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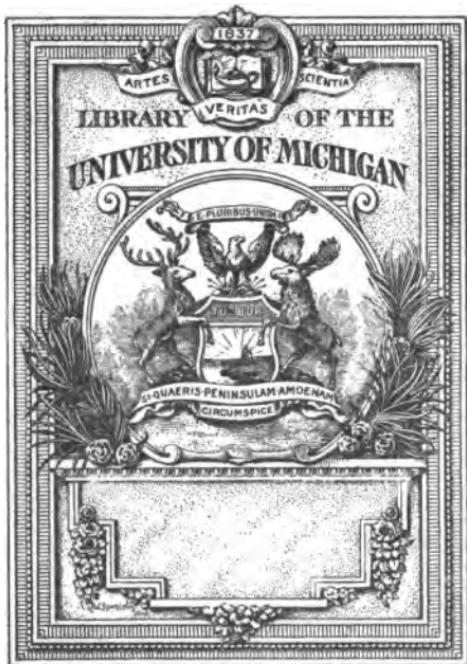
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Thomas Carlyle

*GATEWAY SERIES*

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# ESSAY ON BURNS

BY  
THOMAS CARLYLE

EDITED BY  
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CARLYLE'S BURNS.

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## INTRODUCTION

### I. THOMAS CARLYLE

MR. AUGUSTINE BIRRELL, a leading member of the English Parliament and one of the cleverest of contemporary critics, has said recently: "Young man, do not be in too great a hurry to leave your Carlyle unread." To follow this advice is not so easy for the young as it might seem. Carlyle, as a man, had some characteristics that repel those who do not know the stronger and finer elements in his character, while as a writer he has eccentricities of style and exaggerations of thought that cause the uninitiated to do him an injustice. As these words are being written the public is hearing again the story of Carlyle's married life with emphasis on the unpleasant features of his character and his writings. The world will not know him at his best until it sees him far removed from some of the disagreeable facts revealed by his friend and biographer, Froude.

To the young of his own day he was an inspiring voice. Matthew Arnold, in a memorable passage in his address on Emerson, speaking of the "voices" that sounded at Oxford when he was a student there, refers to the puissant voice of Carlyle as "fresh, comparatively sound,

and reaching our hearts with true prophetic eloquence." When Tyndall was a young man, Carlyle supplied a moral impulse that led him to a strenuous life of scientific research. Froude, after describing the doubt and unrest that pervaded the minds of Englishmen in the middle of the century, says that the voice of Carlyle was "like the voice of ten thousand trumpets in the ears of many young Englishmen." To many men Carlyle has been, if not a teacher, a prophet, emancipating them from all forms of cant and awakening them to the divine significance of life. It is with a view to arousing an interest in Carlyle's personality and to cause students to read with genuine appreciation the *Essay on Burns* and, later, other works of Carlyle, that these introductory words are written.

Thomas Carlyle was born at Ecclefechan in Annandale, Scotland, December 4, 1795. The immediate family to which he belonged cannot trace its ancestry further than Thomas Carlyle, the author's grandfather, who worked as carpenter and farmer for half the year and for the remainder led a wandering life somewhat after the type of the border raiders, frequently leaving his family in destitute circumstances. His son, James Carlyle, after a youth in which he had to "scramble ('scraffle !') for [his] very clothes and food," settled in Ecclefechan in 1773, becoming first an apprentice to a stone mason, then a master builder, and later an independent farmer. The words in which Carlyle has characterized his father are worthy of note :

"More remarkable man than my father I have never met in my journey through life; sterling sincerity in thought, word, and deed, most quiet, but capable of blazing into whirlwinds when needful, and such a flash of just insight and brief natural eloquence and emphasis, true to every feature of it as I have never known in any other. Humour of a most grim Scandinavian type he occasionally had; wit rarely or never—too serious for wit—my excellent mother with perhaps the deeper piety in most senses had also the most sport. No man of my day, or hardly any man, can have had better parents. None of us will ever forget that bold glowing style of his flowing free from the untutored soul. Never shall we again hear such speech as that was. The whole district knew of it. In anger he had no need of oaths; his words were like sharp arrows that smote into the very heart."

He always counted it as one of the greatest of blessings that he had the example of "a real man of God's own making" continually before him, "a true Workman in this vineyard of the Highest." In later years the sight of a bridge or of a house that his father had built inspired him to do honest and enduring work, his highest ambition being to write books as his father had built houses.

His father early in life had come under the influence of the Scottish Kirk and was noted for his rugged and unswerving piety. The religious element was also largely developed in his mother, Margaret Aitken—"of the fairest descent, that of the pious, the just and wise."

She was more approachable than his father; "my heart and tongue played freely only with my mother." She could barely write when he was a young boy and learned to write well in order to correspond with her son. The burden of these letters was, whether he was at the University of Edinburgh or later in London, "Do make religion your great study," "Tell me honestly if you read your chapter e'en and morn, lad." Although his father had perhaps a greater influence in determining his intellectual life, his mother was the one whom of all others, in his childhood or in his later years, he loved best.

He learned reading from his mother and arithmetic from his father, who, realizing at an early day that his son was a brilliant boy, determined to give him a good education. Accordingly Thomas was sent to Annan in 1806. Here he experienced the hardship of being thrown with rude companions who made his life miserable, and the pedantry of teachers who had little power to inspire him. "My teachers," says he in a passage in *Sartor Resartus*, evidently autobiographical, "were hide-bound pedants, without knowledge of man's nature or of boy's; or of aught save their lexicons and quarterly account books. Innumerable dead Vocables they crammed into us and called it fostering the growth of mind." The chief benefit in this academy life was in reading widely in all the books that he could find, and in a reasonably good training in Latin and French.

His father, desiring that his son should give himself

to the ministry, determined to put him at the University of Edinburgh, whither he went in 1809, walking the distance of eighty miles. His university training was little different from that at the Annan Academy, except that in mathematics he found an inspiring teacher, Professor Leslie. The large library afforded him opportunities to "read fluently in almost all cultivated languages in almost all subjects and sciences," while through some few of his college chums he had some contact with the world of real life. Judging from the early letters that passed between these young university students, they must have been thoroughly alive to what was then happening in the world and shrewd interpreters thereof. Carlyle was called "Jonathan," "the Dean," etc., because of his evident tendency to satirize the foibles of men after the manner of Swift.

After graduating at the university, and before entering upon the work of the ministry, he taught school (1814-1818), first for two years at Annan, and then for about the same length of time at Kirkcaldy. Carlyle's temperament could never adapt itself to school-mastering, although he did his duty faithfully. He disliked the business more and more and resolved finally to "perish in the ditch" rather than continue it. The monotony of teaching was broken by his vacations which were spent at Mainhill, where his father had moved from Ecclefechan. At Kirkcaldy he became the intimate friend of Edward Irving, who besides furnishing him with books—notably Gibbon's complete works, which he eagerly devoured in

twelve days, and many of the French classics—was his companion on many long walks by the seashore,—“a fine long sandy beach,”—and in trips to Edinburgh and the Trossachs. They had been brought up within a few miles of each other, and both of them were now looking toward the ministry, so that there was both intellectual and spiritual comradeship. Although their paths diverged widely in later years, their friendship in this, the dawn of life, was of the greatest significance to Carlyle, who for the first time realized “the communion of man with man”—“the freest, brotherliest, bravest human soul mine ever came in contact with.”

Neither the zeal of his parents nor the intimate comradeship of Irving could induce Carlyle to go into the ministry. Both his temperament and his tendency to investigate the faith that he was supposed to champion led him gradually to give up his purpose. Having saved ninety pounds from his four years of teaching, he determined to go to Edinburgh and study law. He found no satisfaction in that, however, nor in writing for Brewster's Encyclopedia, nor in tutoring. From now until 1821 came the saddest and most miserable years of his life. He was attacked by dyspepsia and knew what it was “to be immured in a rotten carcass, every avenue of which is chained into an inlet of pain, till my intellect is obscured and weakened, and my head and heart are alike desolate and dark.” “I want health, health, health,” was his pathetic cry. More than physical suffering, however, was the spiritual crisis through which he now passed.

Unable to find his work in the world,— to adjust his inward and outward capabilities,— he was brought face to face with that nameless unrest, that “high, sad, longing discontent,” that so many of the stronger men of the nineteenth century have had to face. The mood of Byron and of Goethe’s *Werther* was upon him. Even in his home at Mainhill, where he went at the earnest solicitation of his father and family, he “wandered about the moors like a helpless spirit.” In a passage characterized by exquisite beauty and pathos, he has told of the evening when he and Irving, walking from Glasgow to Annandale, began to talk of the truth of the Christian religion. “The talk had grown ever friendlier, more interesting : at length, the declining sun said plainly, You must part. . . . We leant our backs to a dry stone fence, and looking into the western radiance, continued in talk yet a while, loth both of us to go. It was here, just as the sun was sinking, Irving actually drew from me by degrees, in the softest manner, the confession that I did *not* think as he of Christian religion, and it was vain for me to expect I ever could or should.”

But Carlyle could not remain in a state of unrest and doubt. Several influences aided him in working out a genuine and enduring faith. First of all, his own moral integrity and spiritual earnestness that defied the spirit of doubt, even when he was under its spell.

“Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,  
At last he beat his music out.”

The friendship of Irving was soothing to him — “beyond

all other men he was helpful to me when I most needed help." More significant still, "the steady confidence of his father, the anxious affection of his mother and the cordial sympathy of his brothers and sisters" supported him. From an intellectual standpoint the determining influence, aside from all these, was the study of German literature, which was to him as "the revelation of a new Heaven and a new Earth." Goethe especially brought to him the gospel that he was in search of, for Goethe had not only suffered and mourned in bitter agony under the spiritual perplexities of his time, but he had also mastered them. He was above them and had shown others how to rise above them. He had traveled the road that Carlyle was traveling and had found his way from inward imprisonment, doubt, and discontent, into freedom, belief, and clear activity. He taught Carlyle "to reconcile reverence with clearness; to deny and defy what is False, yet believe and worship what is True."

And so, after years of intense spiritual agony, Carlyle found an answer to his questions and doubts. In *Sartor Resartus* he has told of the memorable afternoon in June, 1821, when, while taking one of the many walks to the seashore, he had an experience that corresponds to the conversion that Christians speak of. "And as I so thought, there rushed like a stream of fire over my whole soul; and I shook base Fear away from me forever. I was strong, of unknown strength; a spirit, almost a god. Ever from that time the temper of my misery was changed: not Fear or whining Sorrow was it, but Indig-

nation and grim fire-eyed Defiance. Thus had the EVERLASTING No pealed authoritatively through all the recesses of my Being, of my ME; and then was it that my whole ME stood up in native God-created majesty, and with emphasis recorded its Protest. . . . It is from this hour that I incline to date my Spiritual New-birth, or Baphometic Fire-baptism; perhaps I directly there-upon began to be a Man."

Although this incident is an important landmark in Carlyle's life, it was four years before he conquered all his skepticisms, agonizings, doubtings. He was never at ease in Zion; he was to have struggle after struggle, but from this time he was committed to two or three fundamental truths and had thus won, as he afterward said, "an immense victory." The faith of Carlyle—so important for the understanding of his later life—may be summed up in three passages from *Sartor Resartus*. "What is Nature? Ha! why do I not name thee GOD? Art thou not the 'Living Garment of God'? . . . The Universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres, but godlike and my Father's!" "Love not Pleasure; love God. This is the EVERLASTING YEA, wherein all contradiction is solved; wherein whoso walks and works, it is well with him." "I too could now say to myself: Be no longer a Chaos, but a World, or even Worldkin. Produce! produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it, in God's name! 'Tis the utmost thou hast in thee: out with it, then. Up, Up! Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,

do it with thy whole might. Work while it is called To-day ; for the Night cometh wherein no man can work." Henceforth he was ready to proclaim his Gospel — the divineness of Nature, the infinite nature of Duty, and the overwhelming necessity of Work.

In 1822 Carlyle's prospects became brighter, and two chances were offered for him to put into practice his gospel of work. Edward Irving, now growing famous in London, secured for him the position of tutor for the Buller family — parishioners of Irving — at a salary of £200, and soon afterward, at a suggestion of Irving's, the editor of the *London Magazine* made overtures for some translations of German literature. The two fitted in with each other. Faithful to the discharge of his tutorial work, and winning the highest respect of the Buller family, especially of his pupil, Charles Buller, who now and throughout his life was his warm friend, he worked in his leisure moments and during his vacations at Mainhill on the life of Schiller and a translation of *Wilhelm Meister*. Carlyle's first literary work was thus in the translation and interpretation of German literature, which, at the critical time in his life, had meant so much to him. Schiller's life was an inspiration to him, for he too had won the fight with poverty, disease, neglect, and doubt. More satisfying was the translation of Goethe's novel, the most significant portion of which — the passage dealing with the three kinds of reverence — made a profound impression on him.

In June, 1824, Carlyle, who had up to that time never

been out of Scotland, went with the Bullers to London, where he had the pleasure of being thrown intimately again with his old friend Irving, through whom he got an introduction to some of the more prominent literary men of that time. It may be said that English literature was then in a state of decline. The men of the preceding age were either dead or had done their best work, while the men who were to make the literature of the Victorian age were as yet in their teens. Naturally, Carlyle was not very favorably impressed with the literary world. His comments on authors are at once unappreciative and, in some cases, unjust. Coleridge, whom he afterward described in his masterful way in the life of Sterling, he found "unprofitable, even tedious"; Lamb, whose life might have taught him lessons in patience and self-sacrifice, is spoken of in the most contemptuous words; De Quincey is a dwarf with "a laudanum bottle in his pocket and the venom of a wasp in his heart"; while Hazlitt's connection with ginshops and pawnbrokers is selected as his distinguishing characteristic. That which disgusted Carlyle most was the fact that literature was largely reduced to reviewing for the magazines, which seemed to him to destroy the independence of authors. "Does literature lead to this? Good heavens! . . . And is this the literary world?" He will not be "a miserable scrub of an author sharking and writing articles about town like Hazlitt." He returned from London convinced that he would have to fight his battles alone.

One bright spot in this London life was a letter from

Goethe — “like a message from fairyland” — acknowledging the work that Carlyle had done, and greeting him as a new moral force in European literature. He was encouraged to go on with his work. After making arrangements with a London publisher to translate specimens of German romance, he settled at Hoddam Hill, a little farm selected by his father as a suitable place for him to live. Here his brother Alick worked the farm for him, while his mother and sisters kept house. He had long, solitary rides on his horse “Larry,” within full view of the Cumberland mountains. He enjoyed quiet for his work and a deep religious peace such as he had never known. A russet-coated idyl he called the year at this place — “one of the quietest, on the whole, and perhaps one of the most triumphant and important of my life.”

The happiest incident in this year’s life at Hoddam Hill was the coming of Jane Welsh, who for ten days visited the Carlysles in their humble home. He had been introduced to her four years before by their mutual friend, Irving, and had since then visited her often at her home in Haddington. She was the daughter of a prosperous physician, John Welsh (a lineal descendant of John Knox), and of a sensitive, high-strung mother. From her childhood she had been a brilliant and ambitious girl, battling with the conventional and commonplace people by whom she was surrounded. Under the tutelage of Irving she had been stimulated in her passionate desire for learning. With attractive manners and brilliant conversational power,

she was generally known as the flower of Haddington, and was much sought after by the men of that district. Drawn into a larger world of thinking and living by Irving, she had fallen in love with him and he with her. But on account of his engagement to Miss Martin—an engagement from which the young lady would not release him—their love affair ended with the marriage of Irving and the, at least, temporary disappointment of Jane Welsh—and, as some have thought, with the tragedy of each of them. In 1821 she had met Carlyle, and though repelled by his rough manners and his uncouth figure, she had been attracted by his sterling worth and his undoubted genius. At first their friendship was the result of intellectual sympathies; in the first letters that passed between them we find suggestions of poems and novels that might be written in common. Gradually, however, Carlyle came to look upon her as the one suited to be his wife—a notion against which she struggled with diminishing force. The letters that had passed between them while Carlyle was in London were characterized at times by affection, at other times by mutual misunderstanding and shrinking from what seemed to be their destiny.

It was to satisfy herself completely as to Carlyle and his family that she made the visit to Hoddam Hill in the summer of 1825. She went away determined, much against the wishes of her mother, who had objected both to Carlyle's impatience and to his lack of religion, to link her fate with this rugged, and as yet unknown, man. To

her aunt she wrote : " He has a warm, true heart to love me, a towering intellect to command me, and a spirit of fire to be the guiding star of my life ; . . . not a great man according to the most common sense of the word, but truly great in its natural proper sense : a scholar, a poet, a philosopher, a wise and noble man, one who holds his patent of nobility from Almighty God, and whose high stature of manhood is not to be measured by the inch rule of Lilliputs."

They were married October 17, 1826, and went, not to some country paradise such as Hoddam Hill, but to Comely Bank, Edinburgh, where they lived for eighteen months a quiet and somewhat disillusioned life. Mrs. Carlyle's hopes with regard to sharing the intellectual work of Carlyle were not realized ; for now and hereafter her husband could do his best work only in almost entire isolation, while both of them suffered from ill health and natural irritability that were to be the sources of continual unhappiness, especially in later years. At Comely Bank they entertained in a very simple way the literary men of Edinburgh — Brewster, Jeffrey, De Quincey, and John Wilson (" Christopher North "). It was difficult for Carlyle to get any settled work, for his German translations were not prospering as they had promised. He began to write a novel, *Wotton Reinfred*, which, though never completed, was afterward worked into *Sartor Resartus*. Jeffrey, at that time the brilliant editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, had been especially attracted by Mrs. Carlyle, and now opened the columns of his review

for Carlyle's articles on *Richter* and *The State of German Literature*, articles in which Carlyle defended the Germans against the charges of bad taste, mysticism, and obscurity.

After trying unsuccessfully for positions in London University and at St. Andrews, Carlyle decided in May, 1828, to move to Craigenputtock, — the ancestral home of the Welshes, — where, with the exception of two winters spent in London (1831-1832) and Edinburgh (1832-1833), he lived until 1834. Mrs. Carlyle had written before her marriage that she would not live there with an angel ; now she acceded to the wishes of her husband with good grace and began her life, as Jeffrey said, as an exile to Siberia. Froude describes this place as "the dreariest spot in all the British dominions," a house in the middle of the desert — "gaunt and hungry looking," surrounded by peat bogs, and sixteen miles distant on every side from all conveniences of life, shops, and even post-offices. There were times when Mrs. Carlyle took pleasure in looking after the garden, poultry yard, dairy, and kitchen, and in the evening readings with her husband, but most of the time the dreariness and isolation of her life wore heavily upon her. For Carlyle this life was undoubtedly the best that he could have lived. His long rides on horseback and his walks over the moors with the ground crisp under his feet — "the stars shining over his head, silent in the great silence" — gave him "a stock of robust health," and what is better, gave him opportunity for those meditations and spiritual reveries that were to be permanent con-

tributions to the thought of the century in which he lived. "In those years we see the leap from the immature energy of youth to the full intellectual strength of completed manhood." The essays on *Burns*, *Voltaire*, *Diderot*, *Dr. Johnson* and *Characteristics*, show an ever surer mastery of form and more definite conception of literature and life. He had fought out his battle with unbelief in the early twenties. Scarcely less formidable was his fight for literary independence against the acknowledged leaders of that day. In his ears were sounding continually the words of Jeffrey, who slashed the *Essay on Burns* to pieces and took occasion to advise him as to his future work. This advice was friendly, no doubt, but it was none the less the voice of the tempter. Failing on Wordsworth and Coleridge, Jeffrey hoped to succeed in keeping this brilliant young man in the paths of elegance and good taste and out of the ways of mysticism and idealism. He told him that he was misusing his talent, standing in his own way, with his "desperate darkness of audacious mysticism," his mannerisms and affectation, and his advocacy of German literature. He pointed to Macaulay's great success and told him that the same brilliant future awaited him if he would write like a cultivated Englishman and not be so desperately in earnest about things that were of no importance. Even Carlyle's best friends, such as Emerson and, later, John Sterling, pleaded with him against his "defying diction."

In the face of such criticism, in the face of poverty and neglect, Carlyle wrote *Sartor Resartus*, at once the

story of his own spiritual growth and his almost defiant violation of the conventional diction of the time. He felt for some time that he had a book that "would cause ears to tingle, and one day out it must and will issue." In 1830 he wrote the first sketch, and from February, 1831, to the autumn of the year, he expanded and rewrote it in book form. When he finished writing it his wife said, "It is a work of genius, dear," but when he went to London to dispose of it, he found no publisher who would consider it. None cried, Good speed to it. "Much as I can speak, I am alone, alone." It was finally published in *Fraser's Magazine*, beginning with December, 1833, and came out in book form in America in 1836, under the patronage of Emerson. In England for six years it made no impression whatever, and Carlyle could only say in the midst of every possible discouragement, "Courage, courage!"

The one voice that came to him in these years of obscurity was that of Emerson. Just at the end of their stay at Craigenputtock "the Carlysles were sitting alone at a dinner on Sunday afternoon at the end of August [1833], when a Dumfries carriage drove to the door and there stepped out of it a young American, then unknown to fame." It was like the coming of a sky messenger to the two lonely people, and the friendship then begun was one of great inspiration in the life of each man. Emerson said to Carlyle, "Faint not—the word you utter is heard, though in the ends of the earth and by humble men; it works, prevails."

During Carlyle's second visit to London (1831-1832) he had met John Stuart Mill and Leigh Hunt, who turned his attention toward London. Furthermore, while writing his essays on *Voltaire*, *Diderot*, and the *Diamond Necklace*, and later in his wide reading in the Advocate's Library at Edinburgh (in the winter of 1832-1833), he had become greatly interested in the French Revolution, the history of which he now determined to write. To do this he must be near the large libraries, and so in 1834 the Carlyles moved to London. They settled at 5 (now 21) Cheyne Row, Chelsea, where they lived for the remainder of their lives.

The first three years spent here were a continuation, in many respects, of the hard struggle that they had gone through at Craigenputtock. There was little social life, and Carlyle was working prodigiously on his history — writing as "with force of fire." For twenty-three months he did not receive a penny for his writings. "Literature will never yield bread," he said, "nor stomach to digest bread." With extreme poverty staring him in the face he rejected a place on *The Times* and also a clerkship with the Montagues, fully persuaded that his one work was to write. In March, 1835, he had finished the first volume of his history. Giving it to his friend Mill to read, he was overwhelmed one morning with the news that the manuscript had been carelessly thrown into the fire by a servant. Crushing his feeling for the moment out of sympathy for Mill, he groaned for weeks under this almost intolerable

affliction. He went to work, however, to rewrite the volume, determined to stake all on the success of the work. "If this does not succeed," he said, "I will go to America and build a new Scotsbrig in the western forest." By prodigious work, without taking any vacation, he finished it early in 1837, saying to his wife as he walked out of the room, "I know not whether this book is worth anything, nor what the world will do with it, or misdo, or entirely forbear to do, as is likely; but this I can tell the world, you have not had for a hundred years any book that comes more direct and flamingly from the heart of a living man."

Carlyle was not this time to be disappointed. The *French Revolution* established him in the minds of all thinking people as one of the great men of letters of his day. Southey read it several times. Dickens carried a copy of it with him wherever he went. Thackeray reviewed it sympathetically. Carlyle had won his battle, not by writing as other men did, not by following any of the conventionalities of literary art, but by writing in his own way his own interpretation of history. Even Jeffrey and Macaulay recognized that he did well in not trying to do as other men. The same year that saw the publication of the *French Revolution* witnessed Carlyle's appearance as a lecturer. For four successive years he lectured to some of the most brilliant audiences that ever assembled in London, the most notable of the series being *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, published in book form in 1841. It must have been a strange phenomenon, that

of this rude Scotchman with his Scotch accent and his glowing eyes pouring out upon the fashionable people of London his "Annandale grapeshot." He had no conventional message for them, but attempted always to overcome prejudice or to awaken interest in men not hitherto considered of any vital importance.

Carlyle was never a "clubbable" man, but he and his wife mingled freely in society at times. He was thrown in a social way with the men of the older generation, such as Landor, Rogers, Moore, Southey, and Wordsworth. He was also a member of the Sterling Club, to which belonged Tennyson, Spedding, Milnes, Maurice, and others of the brightest and most promising scholars and men of letters. He was evidently a good conversationalist, although he had the fault that he criticised in Coleridge, the habit of doing all the talking himself. He was dramatic, extravagant, overbearing. He was probably at his best in his own home when one or two men that he liked best would come to him. In a letter to Tennyson, written after the appearance of the 1842 edition of the latter's poems, he says: "But do you, when you return to London, come down to me and let us smoke a pipe together. With few words, with many, or with none, it need not be an ineloquent Pipe."

One season the Carlysles entertained a company of their friends in a somewhat formal reception. "At midnight," Carlyle says, "I smoked a peaceable pipe, praying it might be long before we saw the like again." One of the pleasures he enjoyed most was the friendship

of the better class of noblemen — notably, the Ashburton family and Lord Houghton, whom he visited frequently in their London and country homes. We read also of excursions to Wales, Belgium, the Lake country, and elsewhere. Always the city of London was interesting and deeply impressive to Carlyle. He could see from his window the towers of Westminster and the dome of St. Paul's. He never tired of walking in the parks or of watching the crowds upon the streets. "He rode and walked about the environs of London ; and the roaring of the suburban trains and the gleam of the green and crimson signal lamps were wildly impressive to him."

However interested he was in London or in other parts of England, he went almost every year to his home in Scotland ; especially after the completion of a book or a series of lectures would he find rest and peace in his mother's quiet home. His father's death in 1832 had drawn him all the nearer to his mother and her family. A typical vacation is that of 1837, after finishing the *French Revolution* and his first course of lectures — wholly idle, reading novels, smoking pipes in the garden with his mother. He writes to his wife : "The trees wave peaceful music in front of my window. Mother is washing in the kitchen to my left. The sound of Jamie building his peat-stack is audible, and they are storing potatoes down below. . . . I hear the rustle of the trees, the music of the burn." In another letter he says : "One night, late, I rode through the village where I was born. The old kirkyard tree, a huge old gnarled ash,

was nestling itself softly against the great twilight in the north. A star or two looked out and the old graves were all there, and my father and my sister; and God was above us all." In the same graveyard his mother was placed in 1853. After her death he continued to visit his brothers and sisters, keeping to the last the clannish spirit so characteristic of Scottish families.

After attaining independence as a man of letters, Carlyle continued to write with all the force of his genius. In 1839 he published *Chartism*; in 1841, *Heroes and Hero-Worship*; in 1843, *Past and Present*; in 1845, *Life and Letters of Oliver Cromwell*; in 1850, *Latter Day Pamphlets*; in 1851, *Life of John Sterling*; in 1858-1865, *Frederick the Great*. He brought to all of these works the sincerity of purpose, the indefatigable industry, and the determination to do the best work of which he was capable, that had characterized his earliest works. They were undertaken with a desire either to arouse the people of England to the enormous suffering of the laboring classes, or, as in his historical works, "to recover human figures of immense historical consequence from centuries of accumulated slander and misconception." He wrote them all as with force of fire.

When he completed *Frederick the Great* he received a signal recognition of his place in British life in his election as rector of the University of Edinburgh. He had never lost his love of Scotland, and this recognition of his services deeply affected him. Beyond his own expectation or those of his friends, he succeeded in the

inaugural address that he delivered in 1866. Tyndall's account of the occasion is an expansion of the words he sent back by telegram to Mrs. Carlyle, "A perfect triumph." In the address Carlyle summed up his entire life work and gave to the young men of his *alma mater* his philosophy of life in a nutshell. A student who wishes to get at the essential heart of Carlyle's work cannot do better than read this notable address, which received not only the applause of the brilliant audience in Edinburgh, but the admiration of men throughout the English speaking world. It was the acme of his fame and a fitting climax to his literary career.

Just after this brilliant success, while he was resting at his brother's home in Annandale, there came the news of Mrs. Carlyle's sudden death. During the period from 1845 to 1857 there had been an almost serious estrangement between them; but during the last three years of her life, the old affectionate days had come back—"the old tone, the old confidences." "The sunset of their married life recovered something of the colors of its morning," says Froude. The shock of his wife's death was therefore all the keener. "I was rich once," he says, "had I known it, very rich; and now I am become poor unto the end." As if to atone for the suffering that his wife had endured while living—partly on account of his own irritability—he wrote the beautiful tribute to her now found in his *Reminiscences* and planned the publication of her *Letters and Memorials*.

Not much is to be said of the last years of Carlyle's

life. He was, as he described himself to Emerson, "a gloomily serious, silent, and sad old man." Notable honors came to him in 1874 from the German Emperor, and from Disraeli, the prime minister of England. On his eightieth birthday men of letters throughout the English-speaking world did honor to him. He died February 4, 1881, and was buried—not in Westminster Abbey, where his friend Dean Stanley wished him to be—but in the little graveyard at Ecclefechan, where he had so often paused in his solitary walks and thought of the mysteries of human life.

## II. CARLYLE'S CHARACTER AND INFLUENCE

One of the keenest and most unsympathetic of Carlyle's recent critics closes his essay with the statement that his work is everywhere "penetrated with the power of a prodigious personality." Unbalanced though he was, he stands out in English literary history as one of the most striking and gigantic figures. He has, as Mr. Burroughs has said, many of the elements that went to the making of the old Vikings and the Norse gods. Only Swift, in the eighteenth century, produces such a sense of strength and crude titanic force.

If one seeks, as Carlyle does in the case of Burns, for the source of the tragedy of his life—and tragical in a sense his life was—he will find it in his impatience. The smallest things of life irritated him beyond measure; we hear of the "demon fowls" of his neighbor's yard,

of the "devil's brood of house servants," the "annual earthquake of house cleaning." He was also cross and disagreeable in his conversation. Mrs. Carlyle got so used to his "growls," that she did not feel natural when they were not forthcoming. Even his best friends tired him, after a little. Emerson, at first "a sky messenger," became in his mind an apostle of moonshine and transcendental mist; John Stuart Mill, whose friendship was the inspiration of his early London life, came to be considered "a poor man"; while Tennyson, whom he had recognized as "a poet of the eternal melodies" in the 1842 edition of his poems, could never in his later work attract his admiration. Carlyle's work irritated him; he groaned under it as under an intolerable burden. His *Frederick the Great* was a "thirteen years' war," his *Cromwell*, "four years of abstruse toil, obscure speculation, futile wrestling and misery." He was impatient with his age. As his friend John Sterling said, "Wanting peace himself, his fierce dissatisfaction fixes on all that is weak, corrupt, and imperfect around him; and instead of a calm and steady coöperation with all those who are endeavoring to apply the highest ideas as remedies for the worst evils, he holds himself aloof in savage isolation." He knew nothing of what it means either for the individual or the nation to work within limitations. He found a cure for the evils of his age, either by trying to bring back some age that was passed away, or by evoking some sudden transformation. Prophet as he was of a higher social order in which justice and humanity would prevail, he had little sympathy

with men like Lord Shaftesbury or Charles Kingsley, who prepared the way for gradual changes. Earnest as he was to bring about "an exodus from Houndsditch,"—an establishment of faith on a proper basis rather than on the prevailing creeds,—he was yet thoroughly impatient with the authors of *Essays and Reviews*, or the well-trained scientists who were doing much to make such an exodus possible. The master achievements of his own time—the triumph of democracy and the extension of the scientific spirit and of scientific methods into all departments of human activity—excited in him naught but disgust. In a word, he had not learned the wisdom of Paracelsus:—

"To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind,  
. . . . to sympathize, be proud  
Of their half-reasons, faint aspirings, dim  
Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies,  
Their prejudice and fears, and cares and doubts;  
All with a touch of nobleness, despite  
Their error, upward tending, although weak."

All of which is to say that Carlyle had the temperament of a prophet, rather than the ability to construct and organize institutions and forces. He had to a far greater degree than Scott imbibed "the Presbyterian gospel of John Knox." In the intellectual expression of his religious ideals he had gone far beyond the Kirk of his father, being influenced to a large degree by German philosophy and literature; but the spirit of the Scotch Kirk, and through that of the old Hebrew Theoc-

racy, was the foundation of all his thinking and living. "Though he never wagged his pow in an orthodox pulpit, he was a preacher of righteousness all his days." Goethe, with that rare penetration so characteristic of him, fixed upon Carlyle's chief contribution to modern life when he spoke of him as a moral force. He had the look of a prophet, as all must have felt who ever looked at the great portrait by Millais in the National Gallery at London—"his tumbled hair and shaggy beard, his gaunt face, his sunken cheeks and deep-set, wonderful eyes." Literature was only valuable to him as the expression of moral ideas. "Literary men," he says, "are the appointed interpreters of this Divine Idea; a perpetual priesthood, one might say, standing forth, generation after generation, as the dispensers and living type of God's everlasting wisdom."

It is from this essentially religious standpoint that all his books are written. He was not a man to make distinctions, he overstated things, but the overruling passion of his life was to arouse the people of England to a sense of the reality of a just and sovereign God. He had, says Mr. William Vaughan Moody, "an intense moral indignation against whatever is weak, or false, or mechanical; an intense moral enthusiasm for whatever is sincere and heroically forceful." He attacked the materialism of his age because he saw in it the deadening of the spiritual forces of man. He had little patience with science because it seemed to him to try to do away with the infinite wonder and miracle of God's universe. He opposed

democracy because it seemed to put the voice of the multitude above the voice of the inspired leader or of God himself. He set himself squarely against both the Oxford and Broad Church movements because they seemed to him to lack the moral fiber and the religious fervor of the sterner religion of Puritanism. It is easy to see now that Carlyle was wrong in his interpretation of all these contemporary movements, and yet the value of his work in pointing out the dangers inherent in them can never be overestimated. Undoubtedly the great danger of modern life has been its tendency to substitute mechanics for dynamics — institutions, methods, societies, ballot-boxes, constitutions, have, at times, taken the place of spiritual forces. "There is a science," says Carlyle, "which treats of, and practically addresses, the primary, unmodified forces and energies of man, the mysterious springs of Love, and Fear, and Wonder, of Enthusiasm, Poetry, Religion, all which have a truly vital and infinite character." "The truth is men have lost their belief in the Invisible, and believe, and hope, and work, only in the Visible ; or to speak it in other words : This is not a Religious age. Only the material, the immediately practical, not the divine and spiritual, is important to us." It is this intense zeal for moral power, as the proper basis of all genuine progress that makes the *French Revolution*, not merely a study in history, but a dramatic presentation of the truth that God's laws must be obeyed if a nation would prosper. Cromwell was a great hero because on battlefield and in senate council he found

no higher authority than the words of the Hebrew psalmist or prophet. Even Frederick the Great, who had little of Cromwell's positive faith in God, became, by reason of the very forcefulness of his personality, the means through which the Almighty spoke to men. *Past and Present*, *Chartism*, and even the bitter *Latter Day Pamphlets* are all characterized by the intense vigor of a man who is delivering the message of God, who will not look with favor upon injustice or man's inhumanity to man.

It is the vigor of his moral teaching that has made Carlyle such a force in his century. Scientists like Tyn-dall and Huxley, even while chafing under his criticism, left notable expressions of their indebtedness to him, both as a teacher and as an inspiring voice. Statesmen who were repelled by his impatient scolding found in his work an inspiration they found nowhere else. Leaders of the Broad Church movement, though receiving little sympathy from him, looked upon *Sartor Resartus*, along with Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, as an artistic setting forth of the essential points in which they believed. Even the most intense believers in democracy are now seeing the truth of Carlyle's criticism, and are fearful that his auguries may be realized.

Carlyle was not, however, a mere teacher. He was one of the greatest of artists. He is extravagant and eccentric in his language as in his thought. At its worst his style is "barbarous, conceited, uncouth, and mystical," but at its best it is "surcharged with feeling, har-

mony, and colour." The permanent justification of it — unusual and eccentric as it may seem — is in the words he wrote to John Sterling, who had remonstrated with him upon it. "A man has but a certain strength; imperfections cling to him, which if he wait till he have brushed off entirely, he will spin forever on his axis, advancing nowhither. . . . The poor people seem to think a style can be put on or put off, not like a skin, but like a coat." Partly his inheritance from the rude but impressive speech of his Annandale father, partly the result of his reading in German literature and in Swift and Sterne, and yet more than all these, the natural vehicle of his own message, his style must be taken for what it is and not judged by other standards. The strong points of it may be seen by the students of this essay, although it has not all the marks of his later style. The essay is almost entirely free from the mannerisms and extravagances which Carlyle caught from Jean Paul Richter. Special attention may be called to his vocabulary and to his figurative language. There are in this essay passages that have the qualities of the best lyrics. The passages setting forth Burns's penetration and imagination are particularly applicable to his own style. Carlyle had an imagination — the power to realize things vividly — such as no other Victorian writer had. It is this that makes his descriptions of scenes so lifelike, his narrations of incidents so dramatic, and his portraits of men so — one almost says — perfect.

## III. THE ESSAY ON BURNS

Carlyle's first work, after getting settled in Craigenputtock — even while "the premises were still littered with dirt" — was to write the *Essay on Burns*. In a letter to his brother John (June 10, 1828), he says, "Lockhart had written a kind of *Life of Burns*, and men in general were making another uproar about Burns. It is this book, a trivial one enough, which I am to *pretend* reviewing." The essay was finished September 15, 1828, and published in the December number of the *Edinburgh Review*. In the meantime, Jeffrey had objected to certain features of the essay and Carlyle had given his consent to making a few changes. When the proof came, however, he found "the first part cut all into shreds — the body of a quadruped with the head of a bird, a man shortened by cutting out his thighs and fixing the knee-caps on the hips." Jeffrey complained that the article was too long and diffuse; he insisted that it must be cut down — cut down, perhaps, to half its dimensions. He remonstrated with him for the Germanisms. "I wish to God I could persuade you to fling away these affectations and be content to write like your famous countrymen of all ages." Carlyle wrote back that the article must stand as he wrote it or be canceled entirely, and Jeffrey submitted. There are undoubtedly traces of Jeffrey's editing even now, especially in the first part. When Carlyle corrected his essays he added three paragraphs (see Notes), but in the main the essay, as we have it now, is the essay as

Carlyle wrote it in the summer of 1828—the essay in which he gave his first interpretation of a British author, his previous articles having been written upon German authors.

So much for the literary history of the essay. It may readily be seen from the sketches of their lives that Carlyle was especially fitted to interpret Burns. They were both lowland Scotch and had been brought up under practically the same circumstances. As Froude says, "The outward circumstances of Burns's life, his origin, his early surroundings, his situation as a man of genius, born in a farmhouse not many miles distant, among the same people and the same associations that were so familiar to himself, could not fail to make him think often of himself while he was writing about his countryman." Carlyle undoubtedly took a certain national pride in this essay. It is, as Dr. Garnett says, "the very voice of Scotland, expressive of all her passionate love and tragic sorrow for her darling son."

Aside from his national interest in Burns, Carlyle had a genuine admiration for the Scotch poet. Burns was the only eighteenth or nineteenth century writer, with the exception of Dr. Johnson, that he praised highly. In *Heroes and Hero-Worship* he refers to him as "the greatest soul in Britain in the eighteenth century," and in a letter to Goethe, he said: "Perhaps you have never heard of this *Burns*; and yet he was a man of the most decisive genius, but born in the rank of a peasant. We English, especially we Scotch, love Burns more than any other Poet we have

had for centuries." In his later life, when he had come to have less and less sympathy with "the thing called poetry," he retained an affectionate interest in Burns; in their old age he and his wife read his songs out of Thomson's *Scottish Airs*. He was aware of Burns's faults; he had a faith such as he says Burns did not have, but despite their differences, he loved him and has given the true interpretation of his fellow-countryman. After seventy-five years this essay remains the best interpretation of Burns. Lockhart said in the preface to his *Life of Burns*, "As to criticism on Burns's poetry, no one can suppose that anything of consequence remains to be added on a subject that has engaged the pens of Mackenzie, Scott, Jeffrey, Walker, Wordsworth, Campbell, and Wilson," and yet this essay of Carlyle's was to be written that very year. In recent years Robert Louis Stevenson and Mr. Henley have set forth the worst features of Burns's character in all their baldness, but we feel that Carlyle has given the true proportion between Burns's virtues and faults in a way that no other man has done.

The essay is notable as a type of the best literary criticism. Criticism with Carlyle is no "cold business" — it is the genuine and heartfelt appreciation of a man's work; it is concerned not so much with what is done wrong as with what is done right. He had little use for the judicial criticism that prevailed in contemporary reviews. Furthermore, he has stated clearly his conception of poetry. Later in life he had less and less sympathy with poetry, but here, as in his essays on Goethe and

in his lecture on the Hero as Poet, he has given the poet his true place in the life of the world, above that of conquerors and legislators. His interpretation of the poet's need for sincerity, for depth of vision and for vivid imagination, and his strong denunciation of affectation in literature should be definitely fixed in mind. He is one-sided in his views of Keats and Scott, but one forgets that in reading the very carefully wrought out analysis of Burns's songs.

Significant, also, is the moral teaching of the essay ; it is an expression of Carlyle's own view of human life. "It is subjective as well as objective ; it is lyrical as well as demonstrative ; it is Carlyle as well as Burns." "The *Essay on Burns*," says Mr. John Morley, "had the same effect on us at Oxford as had Cardinal Newman's sermons." As has been seen from the biographical sketch of Carlyle, he had just passed through a spiritual crisis in which his fate had become fixed and his grip on things thoroughly established. In interpreting the strong and the weak points in Burns's character he was giving expression—in an indirect rather than in a direct way—to his own newly found faith. Many of the same ideas were to be expressed in his later works, but in this essay they are stated with a "sweet reasonableness" not always characteristic of him. There is a certain poise in his thought, at times a lyrical movement in his style that he did not often attain.

## IV. ROBERT BURNS

Carlyle in his essay has given, as he intimates in his introductory paragraphs, "a delineation of the resulting character as a living unity"; he has painted a portrait of Burns, rather than given the details or even well-defined periods of his life. It is necessary, therefore, as a supplement to the essay, to give the most significant facts of Burns's life.

Robert Burns, the son of William Burness and Agnes Brown, was born near Alloway Kirk — two miles from Ayr and within a hundred yards of the banks of bonny Doon — January 25, 1759. His father was at that time a gardener and a small farmer living in an humble clay-built cottage of his own make. "My father," he says, in a letter to Dr. Moore, "was of the north of Scotland, the son of a farmer, and was thrown by early misfortunes on the world at large, where in many years' wanderings and sojournings he picked up a pretty large quantity of observation and experience, to which I am indebted for most of my little pretensions of wisdom." He emphasizes his father's knowledge of men, their manners, and their ways, and his stubborn, ungainly integrity. He was a better educated man than Carlyle's father, though not so industrious or so practical. He read books and wrote a good English style and was for several years the only teacher his boys had. Burns has embalmed his memory — as well as that of his mother, sisters, and brothers — in *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, an idealized version of what was the

daily life of Mount Oliphant and Lochlea. His mother — “a patient, virtuous, industrious housewife,” had a more equable temper; her memory was stored with old traditions, songs, and ballads — an influence further stimulated by an old woman who resided in the family and who had “the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning the devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, . . . . enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery.”

Burns and his brother Gilbert were fortunate in having as a teacher for two or three years John Murdoch, who, besides being a man of excellent character, had good sense. Two points in his training of boys have come to be stressed in modern schools — his training of pupils to a sense of the meaning and value of words by constant practice in composition, and to a careful study of a collection of the best English poems, such as those of Addison, Dryden, Thomson, etc. He also interested them in the books of his own library, one of the most inspiring of which was the *Life of William Wallace*, which, in the language of Burns, poured a Scottish prejudice into his veins which “will boil long there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest.” Two and a half years of schooling under Murdoch was all that the boys had, although they snatched a few weeks now and then from their hard work on the farm to study at some near-by town. Their father, stern though he was, furnished them intellectual companionship. One feature of the family’s life is left out of *The Cotter’s Saturday Night* — their eager reading

of all books they could get their hands on. Burns mentions especially Pope's *Homer*, Addison, Allan Ramsay, Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*, Shakespeare, and above all a select collection of English songs. "The collection of songs was my *vade mecum*. I pored over them, driving my cart, or walking to labor, song by song, verse by verse ; carefully noting the true, tender, or sublime, from affectation and fustian."

In the main, however, his life up to his sixteenth year was one of very plain living and hard work. It was inevitable that there should be a reaction from the drudgery and sternness of this life. It came through love and poetry. In a piece of prose almost idyllic, he has told of the dawning of these two early passions : "You know," he says, "our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labours of the harvest. In my fifteenth summer my partner was a bewitching creature, a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language, but you know the Scottish idiom. She was a bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass. In short, she, altogether unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys here below ! How she caught the contagion I cannot tell. . . . Indeed, I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her when returning in the evening from our labours ; why the tones of her voice made my heartstrings thrill

like an *Æolian* harp ; and especially why my pulse beat such a furious ratan when I looked and fingered over her little hand, to pick out the cruel nettle-stings and thistles. Among her love-inspiring qualities, she sung sweetly ; and it was her favourite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who read Greek and Latin ; but my girl sung a song which was said to be composed by a country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love ; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he ; for, excepting that he could shear sheep and cast peats, his father living in the moorlands, he had no more scholar-craft than myself. Thus with me began love and poetry."

At Mt. Oliphant, where the Burnses lived from 1766 to 1777, Robert had little opportunity for social life, but at Lochlea, their next home, he found many jovial companions. He was "in the secret of half the love affairs of the parish of Tarbolton," and was a member of the bachelor's club,— "half debating, half drinking club." Later he became an enthusiastic member of the Masonic order, of which he was the laureate throughout the district. The spirit of fun that he speaks of in the *Holy Fair* was having its full sway, although he still worked with his father and brother on the farm. He determined in 1781 to go to Irvine and learn the flax dressing trade in order that he might find a readier way to support himself in marriage. It was at

this place that he entered upon the period of dissipation that Carlyle characterizes as his "mud-bath." Here in the midst of a general rout of swaggering and dissipated men he met Richard Brown, who, says Burns, was "the only man I ever knew who was a greater fool than myself, where woman was the presiding star." Brown spoke of a certain fashionable failing with levity, which hitherto "I had regarded with horror." Up to this time, if we are to take the testimony of his brother Gilbert, his love affairs had been characterized by the strictest rules of modesty and virtue, but henceforth his career is one of mingled glory and dishonor. He returned to Lochlea after disappointment and chagrin in 1782, only to find things on the farm going wrong. His father had become involved in a lawsuit with his landlord and in addition was declining in health. He died February, 1784, of phthisical consumption, not before expressing his grave anxiety for the future career of his son Robert, whose genius he had already discovered and for whose immorality he trembled.

Three months before the death of their father, Gilbert and Robert rented the farm of Mossiel,—one hundred and eighteen acres, two miles from the town of Mauchline,—stocking it with implements that they had saved from the wreck of the old farm. They set about their work with much determination. Robert says, "I read farming books, I calculated crops; I attended markets." But neither of the two brothers was a very successful farmer; the soil was not good and everything went against them.

Robert found refuge from his life of drudgery and his disappointment in the social life of Mauchline. He became "amourist at large." Robert Louis Stevenson, in one of his letters speaking of Burns, says, "I made a kind of chronological table of his various loves and lusts and have been comparatively speechless ever since." The most significant of his love affairs was that with Jean Armour, which led to difficulties with the courts and the church. Partly on this account he became involved in the controversies then waging between the Old and New Lights. He naturally took the side of the New Lights, or the Liberals, because they held a less stern view of life and a more liberal interpretation of religion.

It is not pleasant, however, to dwell on the external aspects of Burns's life at this period. That is not his true life at Mossiel. With the decline of his material interests and with the decline of moral life came an outburst of song from the autumn of 1784 to the spring of 1786 that has been rarely equaled in English literature. "The fountains of poetry were unsealed within," and out of the bounding vigor as well as the haunting melancholy of his life came nearly all of the poems that Carlyle especially mentions in this essay. He had at Lochlea written a few notable poems—*The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie*, *My Nanie*, *O*, and *Mary Morison*. But now "he wrote masterpiece after masterpiece with a rapidity and assurance, a command of means, a brilliancy of effect, which make his achievement one of the most remarkable in English letters." He gradually

formed the ideal of becoming a poet who might celebrate the glories of Scotland. In the poem of *The Vision* he has described something of the struggle that went on in his mind. To him sitting "lanely by the ingle-cheek," in the "auld, clay biggin'," after a hard day's work, thinking of how he had wasted his time, "half-mad, half-fed, half-sarkit," the Scottish Muse, "a tight, outlandish hizzie," comes. She has "a wildly-witty, rustic grace" and, greeting him as her own inspired bard, she tells him that she has watched him from his childhood and has heard his rudely caroled phrase and uncouth rhyme and that he will live to celebrate the glories of his native land. Before leaving she crowns him with a wreath, and henceforth he is a dedicated spirit.

Everything about him he turned into materials of poetry — his revels at the Poosie-Nansie tavern are preserved in *The Jolly Beggars*; his quarrels with the church in poem after poem of brilliant satire; the customs of the people in *Halloween*; his farm life, present and past, in *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, the *Field Mouse*, the *Mountain Daisy*; while his friends — brother bards and patrons — are remembered in rollicking and brilliant verse. He is in full possession of all his powers — pathos, sympathy, keenness of vision, humor. The poems come to him sometimes as he follows the plow, and he goes to his little garret at night to write them out. He repeats them to his brother as they go about their work. Most of all, they come to him as he walks along the banks of the Ayr in silent meditation and at times religious

rapture. The muse was "seldom lazy" in those days at Mossgiel.

Great as these poems now seem to us, they would perhaps not have been published had not Burns, disappointed with his farming project and chagrined at his experiences with Jean Armour, decided to leave the country for the West Indies. At his friend Gavin Hamilton's suggestion, he offered a volume of his poems to a printer in Kilmarnock. He was generously aided by a number of his friends in Mauchline and Ayr in securing enough subscriptions to guarantee the expenses of the volume. While the poems were being printed, during the summer of 1786, he was being pursued by Jean Armour's father and for several days had "to skulk from covert to covert under all the terrors of a jail," as some ill-advised people had uncoupled "the merciless pack of the law" at his heels. In these days of despondency and poverty—increased by the death of Highland Mary whom in the meantime he had met and become engaged to—he wrote one of his saddest poems, his *Farewell to Scotland*.

His volume of poems was published in July, 1786, and was received at once with much enthusiasm by the people of that section of Scotland. He still intended to sail, however, and had engaged passage at Greenock, when a letter came from Dr. Blacklock that opened up the prospect of a new world to him in Edinburgh. He had before this met Professor Dugald Stewart, a distinguished professor of philosophy in the University of Edinburgh,

who had passed a very favorable verdict on his poems. So with the advice of friends and with the full consent of his family, he set out for the Scotch capital on November 27. His journey seems to have been something of a triumph, the rude farmers and laborers, at the given signal, crowding around him in some of the villages through which he passed. This early volume had been read not only by the gentry but by plowboys and maid-servants, who, according to Heron, "gladly bestowed the wages which they earned the most hardly, and which they wanted to purchase necessary clothing, if they might but secure the works of Burns." In Edinburgh he went at once to the humble lodgings of his friend John Richmond, who formerly lived at Mauchline, but it was not long before such prominent noblemen as the Earl of Glencairn and Henry Erskine and such men of letters as Blair, Robertson, Dugald Stewart, and Mackenzie, and such brilliant women as the Duchess of Gordon, had given him a hearty welcome to the most exclusive and cultured circles of the Scotch capital. He at once arranged on favorable terms for a second edition of his poems, which he dedicated to the noblemen and gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt, who generously subscribed to one hundred copies. There is no doubt of the fact that these poems were received with genuine admiration by many men of that illustrious circle. The review of them in *The Lounger* by Henry Mackenzie is a notable tribute to the originality and genius of these poems. And yet it was not so much the poetry of Burns as his personality that

excited the admiration of the higher classes. In the accounts given by Professor Walker his conversational powers are spoken of: "In conversation he was powerful. His conceptions and expressions were of corresponding vigor, and on all subjects were as remote as possible from commonplace. . . . In no part of his manner was there the slightest degree of affectation, nor could the stranger have suspected from anything in his behavior or conversation that he had been for some months the favorite of all the fashionable circles of the metropolis." The young Scott, in a passage quoted at length in Carlyle's essay, calls attention to the wonderful eye of Burns, which indicated his poetical character and temperament: "It was large, and of a dark cast, which glowed (I say literally *glowed*) when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men of my time."

But there was another phase of his life that indicates the earthlier side of his character. In taverns and inns, in lodges, and sometimes in the lowest quarters, the convivial element in his character came to the surface. This tendency to dissipation, united with a certain spirit of affected independence, caused him to lose the favor of some of those who had hailed him as a prodigy. During the summer of 1787 he took a tour throughout Scotland, first to the regions of the border country, afterwards to be celebrated by Scott, and later, after spending a few weeks at his home in Mossiel, to the Highlands, where he visited some of the most famous places celebrated in

Scotch legend and tradition. On these journeys through Scotland, he was interested not so much in the historical and legendary aspects of the country, as in the songs that he picked up here and there from the rudest of people, for he was at this time making a collection of songs for Johnson's *Museum*. Returning to Edinburgh for a second winter, he found that there had been a reaction against him among the circles in which he had moved. His novelty had worn off, and the main incident of this second winter was his Platonic affair with Mrs. M'Lehose, to whom he wrote some of his most fulsome and least genuine letters, and one of his finest lyrics, *Ae Fond Kiss*.

He made out of his Edinburgh edition of the poems about £500, £180 of which he gave to his mother. The rest he used to purchase a farm at Ellisland, near Dumfries, where he proposed to settle with Jean Armour as his wife. After some very hard work in getting his house and farm in order, they began their married life with a determination to make the best out of the succeeding years. The choosing of the farm seemed to be, however, as his friend Cunningham said, a poet's rather than a farmer's choice. As at Mossgiel, he was unfortunate and soon decided to supplement his farm work with the income of an excise-man. This position demanded that he should spend much time in traveling throughout a district of two hundred miles and brought him in contact with the crudest and most dissipated people. He still, however, as he himself said, met the muses now and then, as he journeyed

through the hills of Nithsdale, just as he used to do on the banks of the Ayr. It was in his solitary walks on the banks of the Nith that he composed *Tam O'Shanter* and three of his most popular songs, *Highland Mary*, *John Anderson My Jo*, and *Auld Lang Syne*.

In 1791 he moved to Dumfries to take a more profitable position in the excise. Carlyle has presented so vividly the conclusion of Burns's life that little need be said here. He worked steadily at times on the songs for Johnson's *Museum* and Thomson's *Scottish Airs*, for which he wrote nearly three hundred. More and more, however, he became involved in social life in the taverns. The idlers and traveling gentry were always glad to have a spirit like Burns among them "to enliven them with his wit and eloquence." He became involved in the political troubles, both of a local and general nature. Although originally a Jacobite, he became intensely interested in the success of the French Revolution, sending to the national assembly some guns that he had captured at Dumfries. Indiscreet in his utterances, and sometimes dissipated in his life, he lost the respect of the neighboring gentry, as he had formerly ceased to be respected by the clergy on account of his irreverent poems. After 1794 his health began to decline, and the last two years of his life were spent in great suffering, physical and mental. On his deathbed he wrote two of the saddest letters ever written, one to his father-in-law, begging him to help his wife, who, during all his last years, had been a genuine heroine, and the other to his

friend Thomson : " After all my boasted independence, cursed necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. A cruel wretch of a haberdasher, to whom I owe an account, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process, and will infallibly put me into jail. Do, for God's sake, send me that sum, and that by return of post. Forgive me this earnestness, but the horrors of a jail have made me half distracted." A few days after that (July 21, 1796) he died and was buried in Dumfries.



## ESSAY ON BURNS

*Edinburgh Review*, No. 96. *The Life of Robert Burns*. By  
J. G. Lockhart, LL.B. Edinburgh, 1828.

In the modern arrangements of society, it is no uncommon thing that a man of genius must, like Butler, “ask for bread and receive a stone”; for, in spite of our grand maxim of supply and demand, it is by no means the highest excellence that men are most forward to recognise.<sup>5</sup> The inventor of a spinning-jenny is pretty sure of his reward in his own day; but the writer of a true poem, like the apostle of a true religion, is nearly as sure of the contrary. We do not know whether it is not an aggravation of the injustice, that there is generally a posthumous retribution.<sup>10</sup> Robert Burns, in the course of Nature, might yet have been living; but his short life was spent in toil and penury; and he died, in the prime of his manhood, miserable and neglected: and yet already a brave mausoleum shines over his dust, and more than one splendid monument has been<sup>15</sup> reared in other places to his fame; the street where he languished in poverty is called by his name; the highest personages in our literature have been proud to appear as his commentators and admirers; and here is the *sixth* narrative of his *Life* that has been given to the world!<sup>20</sup>

Mr. Lockhart thinks it necessary to apologise for this new attempt on such a subject: but his readers, we believe, will readily acquit him; or, at worst, will censure only the performance of his task, not the choice of it.

5 The character of Burns, indeed, is a theme that cannot easily become either trite or exhausted; and will probably gain rather than lose in its dimensions by the distance to which it is removed by Time. No man, it has been said, is a hero to his valet; and this is probably true; but the  
10 fault is at least as likely to be the valet's as the hero's.

For it is certain, that to the vulgar eye few things are wonderful that are not distant. It is difficult for men to believe that the man, the mere man whom they see, nay, perhaps painfully feel, toiling at their side through the  
15 poor jostlings of existence, can be made of finer clay than themselves. Suppose that some dining acquaintance of Sir Thomas Lucy's, and neighbour of John a Combe's, had snatched an hour or two from the preservation of his game, and written us a *Life of Shakspeare*! What dissertations  
20 should we not have had,—not on *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, but on the wool-trade, and deer-stealing, and the libel and vagrant laws; and how the Poacher became a Player; and how Sir Thomas and Mr. John had Christian bowels, and did not push him to extremities! In like  
25 manner, we believe, with respect to Burns, that till the companions of his pilgrimage, the Honourable Excise Commissioners, and the Gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt, and the Dumfries Aristocracy, and all the Squires and Earls, equally with the Ayr Writers, and the New and Old

Light Clergy, whom he had to do with, shall have become invisible in the darkness of the Past, or visible only by light borrowed from *his* juxtaposition, it will be difficult to measure him by any true standard, or to estimate what he really was and did, in the eighteenth century, for his country and the world. It will be difficult, we say ; but still a fair problem for literary historians ; and repeated attempts will give us repeated approximations.

His former Biographers have done something, no doubt, but by no means a great deal, to assist us. Dr. 10 Currie and Mr. Walker, the principal of these writers, have both, we think, mistaken one essentially important thing : Their own and the world's true relation to their author, and the style in which it became such men to think and to speak of such a man. Dr. Currie loved the 15 poet truly ; more perhaps than he avowed to his readers, or even to himself ; yet he everywhere introduces him with a certain patronising, apologetic air ; as if the polite public might think it strange and half unwarrantable that he, a man of science, a scholar and gentleman, should do 20 such honour to a rustic. In all this, however, we readily admit that his fault was not want of love, but weakness of faith ; and regret that the first and kindest of all our poet's biographers should not have seen farther, or believed more boldly what he saw. Mr. Walker offends more deeply in 25 the same kind : and both err alike in presenting us with a detached catalogue of his several supposed attributes, virtues and vices, (instead of a delineation of the resulting character as a living unity.) This, however, is not paint-

ing a portrait ; but gauging the length and breadth of the several features, and jotting down their dimensions in arithmetical ciphers. Nay, it is not so much as that : for we are yet to learn by what arts or instruments the mind <sup>5</sup> could be so measured and gauged.

Mr. Lockhart, we are happy to say, has avoided both these errors. He uniformly treats Burns as the high and remarkable man the public voice has now pronounced him to be : and in delineating him, he has avoided the method of separate generalities, and rather sought for characteristic incidents, habits, actions, sayings ; in a word, for aspects which exhibit the whole man, as he looked and lived among his fellows. The book accordingly, with all its deficiencies, gives more insight, we <sup>15</sup> think, into the true character of Burns, than any prior biography : though, being written on the very popular and condensed scheme of an article for *Constable's Miscellany*, it has less depth than we could have wished and expected from a writer of such power ; and contains <sup>20</sup> rather more, and more multifarious quotations than belong of right to an original production. Indeed, Mr. Lockhart's own writing is generally so good, so clear, direct and nervous, that we seldom wish to see it making place for another man's. However, the spirit of the work <sup>25</sup> is throughout candid, tolerant and anxiously conciliating ; compliments and praises are liberally distributed, on all hands, to great and small ; and, as Mr. Morris Birkbeck observes of the society in the backwoods of America, “the courtesies of polite life are never lost sight of for a

moment." But there are better things than these in the volume ; and we can safely testify, not only that it is easily and pleasantly read a first time, but may even be without difficulty read again.

Nevertheless, we are far from thinking that the problem of Burns's Biography has yet been adequately solved. We do not allude so much to deficiency of facts or documents, — though of these we are still every day receiving some fresh accession, — as to the limited and imperfect application of them to the great end of Biography. Our notions upon this subject may perhaps appear extravagant ; but if an individual is really of consequence enough to have his life and character recorded for public remembrance, we have always been of opinion that the public ought to be made acquainted with all the inward springs and relations of his character. How did the world and man's life, from his particular position, represent themselves to his mind ? How did coexisting circumstances modify him from without ; how did he modify these from within ? With what endeavours and what efficacy rule over them ; with what resistance and what suffering sink under them ? In one word, what and how produced was the effect of society on him ; what and how produced was his effect on society ? He who should answer these questions, in regard to any individual, would, as we believe, furnish a model of perfection in Biography. Few individuals, indeed, can deserve such a study ; and many *lives* will be written, and, for the gratification of innocent curiosity, ought to be writ-

ten, and read and forgotten, which are not in this sense *biographies*. But Burns, if we mistake not, is one of these few individuals; and such a study, at least with such a result, he has not yet obtained. Our own contributions to it, we are aware, can be but scanty and feeble; but we offer them with good-will, and trust they may meet with acceptance from those they are intended for.

Burns first came upon the world as a prodigy; and was, in that character, entertained by it, in the usual fashion, with loud, vague, tumultuous wonder, speedily subsiding into censure and neglect; till his early and most mournful death again awakened an enthusiasm for him, which, especially as there was now nothing to be done, and much to be spoken, has prolonged itself even to our own time. It is true, the "nine days" have long since elapsed; and the very continuance of this clamour proves that Burns was no vulgar wonder. Accordingly, even in sober judgments, where, as years passed by, he has come to rest more and more exclusively on his own intrinsic merits, and may now be well-nigh shorn of that casual radiance, he appears not only as a true British poet, but as one of the most considerable British men of the eighteenth century. Let it not be objected that he did little. He did much, if we consider where and how.

← 25 If the work performed was small, we must remember that he had his very materials to discover; for the metal he worked in lay hid under the desert moor, where no eye but his had guessed its existence; and we may almost

say, that with his own hand he had to construct the tools for fashioning it. For he found himself in deepest obscurity, without help, without instruction, without model ; or with models only of the meanest sort. An educated man stands, as it were, in the midst of a boundless arsenal and magazine, filled with all the weapons and engines which man's skill has been able to devise from the earliest time ; and he works, accordingly, with a strength borrowed from all past ages. How different is *his* state who stands on the outside of that storehouse, and feels that its gates must be stormed, or remain forever shut against him ! His means are the commonest and rudest ; the mere work done is no measure of his strength. A dwarf behind his steam-engine may remove mountains ; but no dwarf will hew them down with a pickaxe ; and he must be a Titan that hurls them abroad with his arms.

It is in this last shape that Burns presents himself. Born in an age the most prosaic Britain had yet seen, and in a condition the most disadvantageous, where his mind, if it accomplished aught, must accomplish it under the pressure of continual bodily toil, nay, of penury and desponding apprehension of the worst evils, and with no furtherance but such knowledge as dwells in a poor man's hut, and the rhymes of a Ferguson or Ramsay for his standard of beauty, he sinks not under all these impediments : through the fogs and darkness of that obscure region, his lynx eye discerns the true relations of the world and human life ; he grows into intellectual strength, and trains himself into intellectual expertness. Impelled

by the expansive movement of his own irrepressible soul, he struggles forward into the general view; and with haughty modesty lays down before us, as the fruit of his labour, a gift, which Time has now pronounced imperishable. Add to all this, that his darksome drudging childhood and youth was by far the kindest era of his whole life; and that he died in his thirty-seventh year: and then ask, If it be strange that his poems are imperfect, and of small extent, or that his genius attained no mastery in its art? (Alas, his Sun shone as through a tropical tornado; and the pale Shadow of Death eclipsed it at noon!) Shrouded in such baleful vapours, the genius of Burns was never seen in clear azure splendour, enlightening the world: but some beams from it did, by fits, pierce through; and it tinted those clouds with rainbow and orient colours, into a glory and stern grandeur, which men silently gazed on with wonder and tears!

We are anxious not to exaggerate; for it is exposition rather than admiration that our readers require of us here; and yet to avoid some tendency to that side is no easy matter. We love Burns, and we pity him; and love and pity are prone to magnify. Criticism, it is sometimes thought, should be a cold business; we are not so sure of this; but, at all events, our concern with Burns is not exclusively that of critics. True and genial as his poetry must appear, it is not chiefly as a poet, but as a man, that he interests and affects us. He was often advised to write a tragedy: time and means were not lent him for this; but through life he enacted a tragedy, and one of

the deepest. We question whether the world has since witnessed so utterly sad a scene; whether Napoleon himself, left to brawl with Sir Hudson Lowe, and perish on his rock, "amid the melancholy main," presented to the reflecting mind such a "spectacle of pity and fear" <sup>5</sup> as did this intrinsically nobler, gentler and perhaps greater soul, wasting itself away in a hopeless struggle with base entanglements, which coiled closer and closer round him, till only death opened him an outlet. Conquerors are a class of men with whom, for most part, the <sup>10</sup> world could well dispense; nor can the hard intellect, the unsympathising loftiness and high but selfish enthusiasm of such persons inspire us in general with any affection; at best it may excite amazement; and their fall, like that of a pyramid, will be beheld with a certain <sup>15</sup> sadness and awe. But a true Poet, a man in whose heart resides some effluvium of Wisdom, some tone of the "Eternal Melodies," is the most precious gift that can be bestowed on a generation: we see in him a freer, purer development of whatever is noblest in ourselves; <sup>20</sup> his life is a rich lesson to us; and we mourn his death as that of a benefactor who loved and taught us.

Such a gift had Nature, in her bounty, bestowed on us in Robert Burns; but with queenlike indifference she cast it from her hand, like a thing of no moment; and it <sup>25</sup> was defaced and torn asunder, as an idle bauble, before we recognised it. To the ill-starred Burns was given the power of making man's life more venerable, but that of wisely guiding his own life was not given. Destiny, —

for so in our ignorance we must speak, — his faults, the faults of others, proved too hard for him ; and that spirit, which might have soared could it but have walked, soon sank to the dust, its glorious faculties trodden under foot in the blossom ; and died, we may almost say, without ever having lived. And so kind and warm a soul ; so full of inborn riches, of love to all living and lifeless things ! How his heart flows out in sympathy over universal Nature ; and in her bleakest provinces discerns a beauty and a meaning ! The "Daisy" falls not unheeded under his ploughshare ; nor the ruined nest of that "wee, cowering, timorous beastie," cast forth, after all its provident pains, to "thole<sup>1</sup> the sleetie dribble<sup>2</sup> and cranreuch<sup>3</sup> cauld." The "hoar visage" of Winter delights him ; he dwells with a sad and oft-returning fondness in these scenes of solemn desolation ; but the voice of the tempest becomes an anthem to his ears ; he loves to walk in the sounding woods, for "it raises his thoughts to *Him that walketh on the wings of the wind.*" A true Poet-soul, for it needs but to be struck, and the sound it yields will be music ! But observe him chiefly as he mingles with his brother men. What warm, all-comprehending fellow-feeling ; what trustful, boundless love ; what generous exaggeration of the object loved ! His rustic friend, his nut-brown maiden, are no longer mean and homely, but a hero and a queen, whom he prizes as the paragons of Earth. The rough scenes of Scottish life, not seen by

<sup>1</sup> Endure.

<sup>2</sup> Drizzle.

<sup>3</sup> Hoarfrost.

him in any Arcadian illusion, but in the rude contradiction, in the smoke and soil of a too harsh reality, are still lovely to him : Poverty is indeed his companion, but Love also, and Courage ; the simple feelings, the worth, the nobleness, that dwell under the straw roof, are dear and venerable to his heart : and thus over the lowest provinces of man's existence he pours the glory of his own soul ; and they rise, in shadow and sunshine, softened and brightened into a beauty which other eyes discern not in the highest. He has a just self-consciousness, which too often degenerates into pride ; yet it is a noble pride, for defence, not for offence ; no cold suspicious feeling, but a frank and social one. The Peasant Poet bears himself, we might say, like a King in exile : he is cast among the low, and feels himself equal to the highest ; yet he claims no rank, that none may be disputed to him. The forward he can repel, the supercilious he can subdue ; pretensions of wealth or ancestry are of no avail with him ; there is a fire in that dark eye, under which the "insolence of condescension" cannot thrive. In his abasement, in his extreme need, he forgets not for a moment the majesty of Poetry and Manhood. And yet, far as he feels himself above common men, he wanders not apart from them, but mixes warmly in their interests ; nay, throws himself into their arms, and, as it were, entreats them to love him. It is moving to see how, in his darkest despondency, this proud being still seeks relief from friendship ; unbosoms himself, often to the unworthy ; and, amid tears, strains to his glowing heart a heart that knows only the name of friendship.

And yet he was "quick to learn"; a man of keen vision, before whom common disguises afforded no concealment. His understanding saw through the hollowness even of accomplished deceivers; but there was a generous credulity in his heart. And so did our Peasant show himself among us; "a soul like an *Æolian* harp, in whose strings the vulgar wind, as it passed through them, changed itself into articulate melody." And this was he for whom the world found no fitter business than quarrelling with smugglers and vintners, computing excise-dues upon tallow, and gauging ale-barrels! In such toils was that mighty Spirit sorrowfully wasted: and a hundred years may pass on, before another such is given us to waste.

All that remains of Burns, the Writings he has left,  
15 seem to us, as we hinted above, no more than a poor mutilated fraction of what was in him; brief, broken glimpses of a genius that could never show itself complete; that wanted all things for completeness: culture, leisure, true effort, nay, even length of life. His poems are,  
20 with scarcely any exception, mere occasional effusions; poured forth with little premeditation; expressing, by such means as offered, the passion, opinion, or humour of the hour. Never in one instance was it permitted him to grapple with any subject with the full collection of his  
25 strength, to fuse and mould it in the concentrated fire of his genius. To try by the strict rules of Art such imperfect fragments, would be at once unprofitable and unfair. Nevertheless, there is something in these poems, marred

and defective as they are, which forbids the most fastidious student of poetry to pass them by. Some sort of enduring quality they must have : for after fifty years of the wildest vicissitudes in poetic taste, they still continue to be read ; nay, are read more and more eagerly, more and more ; extensively ; and this not only by literary virtuosos, and that class upon whom transitory causes operate most strongly, but by all classes, down to the most hard, unlettered and truly natural class, who read little, and especially no poetry, except because they find pleasure in it.<sup>10</sup> The grounds of so singular and wide a popularity, which extends, in a literal sense, from the palace to the hut, and over all regions where the English tongue is spoken, are well worth inquiring into. After every just deduction, it seems to imply some rare excellence in these works.<sup>15</sup> What is that excellence ?

To answer this question will not lead us far. The excellence of Burns is, indeed, among the rarest, whether in poetry or prose ; but, at the same time, it is plain and easily recognised : his Sincerity, his indisputable air of <sup>20</sup> Truth. Here are no fabulous woes or joys ; no hollow fantastic sentimentalities ; no wiredrawn refinings, either in thought or feeling : the passion that is traced before us has glowed in a living heart ; the opinion he utters has risen in his own understanding, and been a light to <sup>25</sup> his own steps. He does not write from hearsay, but from sight and experience ; it is the scenes that he has lived and laboured amidst, that he describes : those scenes, rude and humble as they are, have kindled beau-

tiful emotions in his soul, noble thoughts, and definite resolves ; and he speaks forth what is in him, not from any outward call of vanity or interest, but because his heart is too full to be silent. He speaks it with such 5 melody and modulation as he can ; "in homely rustic jingle" ; but it is his own, and genuine. This is the grand secret for finding readers and retaining them : let him who would move and convince others, be first moved and convinced himself. Horace's rule, *Si vis me flere*, is 10 applicable in a wider sense than the literal one. To every poet, to every writer, we might say : Be true, if you would be believed. Let a man but speak forth with genuine earnestness the thought, the emotion, the actual condition of his own heart ; and other men, so strangely are we all 15 knit together by the tie of sympathy, must and will give heed to him. In culture, in extent of view, we may stand above the speaker, or below him ; but in either case, his words, if they are earnest and sincere, will find some response within us ; for in spite of all casual varieties in 20 outward rank or inward, as face answers to face, so does the heart of man to man.

This may appear a very simple principle, and one which Burns had little merit in discovering. True, the discovery is easy enough : but the practical appliance is 25 not easy ; is indeed the fundamental difficulty which all poets have to strive with, and which scarcely one in the hundred ever fairly surmounts. A head too dull to discriminate the true from the false ; a heart too dull to love the one at all risks, and to hate the other in spite of all

temptations, are alike fatal to a writer. With either, or as more commonly happens, with both of these deficiencies combine a love of distinction, a wish to be original, which is seldom wanting, and we have Affectation, the bane of literature, as Cant, its elder brother, is of morals. 5 How often does the one and the other front us in poetry, as in life! Great poets themselves are not always free of this vice ; nay, it is precisely on a certain sort and degree of greatness that it is most commonly ingrafted. A strong effort after excellence will sometimes solace itself with a 10 mere shadow of success ; he who has much to unfold, will sometimes unfold it imperfectly. Byron, for instance, was no common man : yet if we examine his poetry with this view, we shall find it far enough from faultless. Generally speaking, we should say that it is not true. He refreshes 15 us, not with the divine fountain, but too often with vulgar strong waters, stimulating indeed to the taste, but soon ending in dislike, or even nausea. Are his Harolds and Giaours, we would ask, real men ; we mean, poetically consistent and conceivable men ? Do not these characters, 20 does not the character of their author, which more or less shines through them all, rather appear a thing put on for the occasion ; no natural or possible mode of being, but something intended to look much grander than nature ? Surely, all these stormful agonies, this volcanic heroism, 25 superhuman contempt and moody desperation, with so much scowling, and teeth-gnashing, and other sulphurous humour, is more like the brawling of a player in some paltry tragedy, which is to last three hours, than the

bearing of a man in the business of life, which is to last threescore and ~~ten~~ years. To our minds there is a taint of this sort, something which we should call theatrical, false, affected, in every one of these otherwise so powerful pieces. Perhaps *Don Juan*, especially the latter parts of it, is the only thing approaching to a *sincere* work, he ever wrote; the only work where he showed himself, in any measure, as he was; and seemed so intent on his subject as, for moments, to forget himself. Yet Byron 10 hated this vice; we believe, heartily detested it: nay, he had declared formal war against it in words. So difficult is it even for the strongest to make this primary attainment, which might seem the simplest of all: to *read its own consciousness without mistakes*, without errors involuntary or wilful! We recollect no poet of Burns's susceptibility who comes before us from the first, and abides with us to the last, with such a total want of affectation. He is an honest man, and an honest writer. In his successes and his failures, in his greatness and his littleness, 20 he is ever clear, simple, true, and glitters with no lustre but his own. We reckon this to be a great virtue; to be, in fact, the root of most other virtues, literary as well as moral.

Here, however, let us say, it is to the Poetry of Burns 25 that we now allude; to those writings which he had time to meditate, and where no special reason existed to warp his critical feeling, or obstruct his endeavour to fulfil it. Certain of his Letters, and other fractions of prose composition, by no means deserve this praise. Here, doubt-

less, there is not the same natural truth of style ; but on the contrary, something not only stiff, but strained and twisted ; a certain high-flown inflated tone ; the stilted emphasis of which contrasts ill with the firmness and rugged simplicity of even his poorest verses. Thus no <sup>5</sup> man, it would appear, is altogether unaffected. Does not Shakspeare himself sometimes premeditate the sheerest bombast ! But even with regard to these Letters of Burns, it is but fair to state that he had two excuses. The first was his comparative deficiency in language. Burns, <sup>10</sup> though for most part he writes with singular force and even gracefulness, is not master of English prose, as he is of Scottish verse ; not master of it, we mean, in proportion to the depth and vehemence of his matter. These Letters strike us as the effort of a man to express something <sup>15</sup> which he has no organ fit for expressing. But a second and weightier excuse is to be found in the peculiarity of Burns's social rank. His correspondents are often men whose relation to him he has never accurately ascertained ; whom therefore he is either forearming himself against, <sup>20</sup> or else unconsciously flattering, by adopting the style he thinks will please them. At all events, we should remember that these faults, even in his Letters, are not the rule, but the exception. Whenever he writes, as one would ever wish to do, to trusted friends and on real interests, <sup>25</sup> his style becomes simple, vigorous, expressive, sometimes even beautiful. His letters to Mrs. Dunlop are uniformly excellent.

But we return to his Poetry. In addition to its Sin-

cerity, it has another peculiar merit, which indeed is but a mode, or perhaps a means, of the foregoing: this displays itself in his choice of subjects; or rather in his indifference as to subjects, and the power he has of making all subjects interesting. The ordinary poet, like the ordinary man, is forever seeking in external circumstances the help which can be found only in himself. In what is familiar and near at hand, he discerns no form or comeliness: home is not poetical but prosaic; it is in some past, distant, conventional heroic world, that poetry resides; were he there and not here, were he thus and not so, it would be well with him. Hence our innumerable host of rose-coloured Novels and iron-mailed Epics, with their locality not on the Earth, but somewhere nearer to the Moon. Hence our Virgins of the Sun, and our Knights of the Cross, malicious Saracens in turbans, and copper-coloured Chiefs in wampum, and so many other truculent figures from the heroic times or the heroic climates, who on all hands swarm in our poetry. Peace be with them! But yet, as a great moralist proposed preaching to the men of this century, so would we fain preach to the poets, "a sermon on the duty of staying at home." Let them be sure that heroic ages and heroic climates can do little for them. That form of life has attraction for us, less because it is better or nobler than our own, than simply because it is different; and even this attraction must be of the most transient sort. For will not our own age, one day, be an ancient one; and have as quaint a costume as the rest; not contrasted with

the rest, therefore, but ranked along with them, in respect of quaintness? Does Homer interest us now, because he wrote of what passed beyond his native Greece, and two centuries before he was born; or because he wrote what passed in God's world, and in the heart of man, which is, the same after thirty centuries? Let our poets look to this: is their feeling really finer, truer, and their vision deeper than that of other men,—they have nothing to fear, even from the humblest subject; is it not so,—they have nothing to hope, but an ephemeral favour, even to from the highest:

The poet, we imagine, can never have far to seek for a subject: the elements of his art are in him, and around him on every hand; for him the Ideal world is not remote from the Actual, but under it and within it: nay, he is a poet, precisely because he can discern it there. Wherever there is a sky above him, and a world around him, the poet is in his place; for here too is man's existence, with its infinite longings and small acquirings; its ever-thwarted, ever-renewed endeavours; its unspeakable aspirations, its fears and hopes that wander through Eternity; and all the mystery of brightness and of gloom that it was ever made of, in any age or climate, since man first began to live. Is there not the fifth act of a Tragedy in every death-bed, though it were a peasant's, and a bed of heath? And are wooings and weddings obsolete, that there can be Comedy no longer? Or are men suddenly grown wise, that Laughter must no longer shake his sides, but be cheated of his Farce? Man's life and nature is, as it was,

and as it will ever be. But the poet must have an eye to read these things, and a heart to understand them; or they come and pass away before him in vain. He is a *vates*, a seer; a gift of vision has been given him. Has life no meanings for him, which another cannot equally decipher; then he is no poet, and Delphi itself will not make him one.

In this respect, Burns, though not perhaps absolutely a great poet, better manifests his capability, better proves the truth of his genius, than if he had by his own strength kept the whole *Minerva* Press going, to the end of his literary course. He shows himself at least a poet of Nature's own making; and Nature, after all, is still the grand agent in making poets. We often hear of this and the other external condition being requisite for the existence of a poet. Sometimes it is a certain sort of training; he must have studied certain things, studied for instance "the elder dramatists," and so learned a poetic language; as if poetry lay in the tongue, not in the heart. At other times we are told he must be bred in a certain rank, and must be on a confidential footing with the higher classes; because, above all things, he must see the world. As to seeing the world, we apprehend this will cause him little difficulty, if he have but eyesight to see it with. Without eyesight, indeed, the task might be hard. The blind or the purblind man "travels from Dan to Beersheba, and finds it all barren." But happily every poet is born *in* the world; and sees it, with or against his will, every day and every hour he lives. The mysterious

workmanship of man's heart, the true light and the inscrutable darkness of man's destiny, reveal themselves not only in capital cities and crowded saloons, but in every hut and hamlet where men have their abode. Nay, do not the elements of all human virtues and all human vices ; the passions at once of a *Borgia* and of a *Luther*, lie written, in stronger or fainter lines, in the consciousness of every individual bosom, that has practised honest self-examination ? Truly, this same world may be seen in Mossiel and Tarbolton, if we look well, as clearly as it <sup>10</sup> ever came to light in Crockford's, or the *Tuileries* itself.

But sometimes still harder requisitions are laid on the poor aspirant to poetry ; for it is hinted that he should have *been born* two centuries ago ; inasmuch as poetry, about that date, vanished from the earth, and became no <sup>15</sup> longer attainable by men ! Such cobweb speculations have, now and then, overhung the field of literature ; but they obstruct not the growth of any plant there : the *Shakspeare* or the *Burns*, unconsciously and merely as he walks onward, silently brushes them away. Is not every <sup>20</sup> genius an impossibility till he appear ? Why do we call him new and original, if we saw where his marble was lying, and what fabric he could rear from it ? It is not the material but the workman that is wanting. It is not the dark *place* that hinders, but the dim *eye*. A Scottish <sup>25</sup> peasant's life was the meanest and rudest of all lives, till *Burns* became a poet in it, and a poet of it ; found it a *man's* life, and therefore significant to men. A thousand battle-fields remain unsung ; but the *Wounded Hare* has

not perished without its memorial ; a balm of mercy yet breathes on us from its dumb agonies, because a poet was there. Our *Halloween* had passed and repassed, in rude awe and laughter, since the era of the Druids ; but no *The-5 ocritus*, till Burns, discerned in it the materials of a Scottish Idyl : neither was the *Holy Fair* any *Council of Trent* or *Roman Jubilee* ; but nevertheless, *Superstition* and *Hypoc-10 risy* and *Fun* having been propitious to him, in this man's hand it became a poem, instinct with satire and genuine comic life. *Let but the true poet be given us, we repeat it, place him where and how you will, and true poetry will not be wanting.*

Independently of the essential gift of poetic feeling, as we have now attempted to describe it, a certain rugged *sterling worth* pervades whatever Burns has written ; a virtue, as of green fields and mountain breezes, dwells in his poetry ; it is redolent of natural life and hardy natural men. There is a decisive strength in him, and yet a sweet native gracefulness : he is tender, he is vehement, yet without constraint or too visible effort ; he melts the heart, or inflames it, with a power which seems habitual and familiar to him. We see that in this man there was the gentleness, the trembling pity of a woman, with the deep earnestness, the force and passionate ardour of a hero. Tears lie in him, and consuming fire ; as lightning lurks in the drops of the summer cloud. He has a resonance in his bosom for every note of human feeling ; the high and the low, the sad, the ludicrous, the joyful, are welcome in their turns to his "lightly-moved and all-

conceiving spirit." And observe with what a fierce prompt force he grasps his subject, be it what it may ! How he fixes, as it were, the full image of the matter in his eye ; full and clear in every lineament ; and catches the real type and essence of it, amid a thousand accidents and superficial circumstances, no one of which misleads him ! Is it of reason ; some truth to be discovered ? No sophistry, no vain surface-logic detains him ; quick, resolute, unerring, he pierces through into the marrow of the question ; and speaks his verdict with an emphasis<sup>10</sup> that cannot be forgotten. Is it of description ; some visual object to be represented ? No poet of any age or nation is more graphic than Burns : the characteristic features disclose themselves to him at a glance ; three lines from his hand, and we have a likeness. And, in that<sup>15</sup> rough dialect, in that rude, often awkward metre, so clear and definite a likeness ! It seems a draughtsman working with a burnt stick ; and yet the burin of a Retzsch is not more expressive or exact.

Of this last excellence, the plainest and most comprehensive of all, being indeed the root and foundation of every sort of talent, poetical or intellectual, we could produce innumerable instances from the writings of Burns. Take these glimpses of a snow-storm from his *Winter Night* (the italics are ours) : 25

When biting Boreas, fell<sup>1</sup> and doure,<sup>2</sup>  
*Sharp shivers* thro' the leafless bow'r,  
And Phœbus gies a short-liv'd glou'r<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Keen.

<sup>2</sup> Stubborn.

<sup>3</sup> Stare.

*Far south the lift,<sup>1</sup>  
Dim-dark'ning thro' the flaky show'r  
Or whirling drift:*

'Ae night the storm the steeples rock'd,  
Poor labour sweet in sleep was lock'd,  
While burns wi' snowy wreaths upchok'd  
*Wild-eddying swirl,*  
Or thro' the mining outlet bock'd,<sup>2</sup>  
Down headlong hurl.

10 Are there not "descriptive touches" here? The describer *saw* this thing; the essential feature and true likeness of every circumstance in it; *saw*, and not with the eye only. "Poor labour locked in sweet sleep"; the dead stillness of man, unconscious, vanquished, yet not unprotected, 15 while such strife of the material elements rages, and seems to reign supreme in loneliness: this is of the heart as well as of the eye!—Look also at his image of a thaw, and prophesied fall of the *Auld Brig*:

20 When heavy, dark, continued, a'-day rains  
Wi' deepening deluges o'erflow the plains;  
When from the hills where springs the brawling Coil,—  
Or stately Lugar's mossy fountains boil,  
Or where the Greenock winds his *moorland* course,  
Or haunted Garpal<sup>3</sup> draws his feeble source,  
25 Arous'd by blust'ring winds and *spotting* thowes,<sup>4</sup>  
*In mony a torrent down his snaw-broo<sup>5</sup> rowes;*<sup>6</sup>  
*While crashing ice, borne on the roaring speat,*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sky. <sup>2</sup> Vomited. <sup>3</sup> *Fabulosus* Hydaspes! (*Carlyle's note.*)

<sup>4</sup> Thaws. <sup>5</sup> Melted snow. <sup>6</sup> Rolls. <sup>7</sup> Torrent.

*Sweeps dams and mills and brigs<sup>1</sup> a' to the gate;*<sup>2</sup>  
And from Glenbuck down to the Rottonkey,  
Auld Ayr is just one lengthen'd tumbling sea;  
Then down ye'll hurl, Deil nor ye never rise!  
And dash the gumlie jaups<sup>3</sup> up to the pouring skies.

5

The last line is in itself a Poussin-picture of that Deluge ! The welkin has, as it were, bent down with its weight ; the "gumlie jaups" and the "pouring skies" are mingled together ; it is a world of rain and ruin. — In respect of mere clearness and minute fidelity, the *Farmer's* commendation of his *Auld Mare*, in plough or in cart, may vie with Homer's Smithy of the Cyclops, or yoking of Priam's Chariot. Nor have we forgotten stout *Burn-the-wind* and his brawny customers, inspired by *Scotch Drink* : but it is needless to multiply examples. One other trait of a much finer sort we select from multitudes of such among his *Songs*. (It gives, in a single line, to the saddest feeling the saddest environment and local habitation : )

*The pale Moon is setting beyond the white wave,*  
*And time is setting wi' me, O :*  
*Farewell, false friends ! false lover, farewell !*  
*I'll nae mair trouble them nor thee, O.*

20

This clearness of sight we have called the foundation of all talent ; for in fact, unless we *see* our object, how shall we know how to place or prize it, in our understanding, our imagination, our affections ? Yet it is not in it-

<sup>1</sup> Bridges.

<sup>2</sup> Out of the way.

<sup>3</sup> Muddy splashes.

self, perhaps, a very high excellence ; but capable of being united indifferently with the strongest, or with ordinary power. Homer surpasses all men in this quality : but strangely enough, at no great distance below him are 5 Richardson and Defoe. It belongs, in truth, to what is called a lively mind ; and gives no sure indication of the higher endowments that may exist along with it. In all the three cases we have mentioned, it is combined with great garrulity ; their descriptions are detailed, ample 10 and lovingly exact ; Homer's fire bursts through, from time to time, as if by accident ; but Defoe and Richardson have no fire. Burns, again, is not more distinguished by the clearness than by the impetuous force of his con-ceptions. Of the strength, the piercing emphasis with 15 which he thought, his emphasis of expression may give a humble but the readiest proof. Who ever uttered sharper sayings than his ; words more memorable, now by their burning vehemence, now by their cool vigour and laconic pith ? A single phrase depicts a whole sub-ject, a whole scene. We hear of "a gentleman that de-rived his patent of nobility direct from Almighty God." Our Scottish forefathers in the battle-field struggled for-ward "*red-wat-shod*"<sup>1</sup> : in this one word a full vision of horror and carnage, perhaps too frightfully accurate 20 for Art !

In fact, one of the leading features in the mind of Burns is this vigour of his strictly intellectual perceptions.

<sup>1</sup> See notes.

A resolute force is ever visible in his judgments, and in his feelings and volitions. Professor Stewart says of him, with some surprise : " All the faculties of Burns's mind were, as far as I could judge, equally vigorous ; and his predilection for poetry was rather the result of his own ; enthusiastic and impassioned temper, than of a genius exclusively adapted to that species of composition. From his conversation I should have pronounced him to be fitted to excel in whatever walk of ambition he had chosen to exert his abilities." But this, if we mistake <sup>10</sup> not, is at all times the very essence of a truly poetical endowment. Poetry, except in such cases as that of Keats, where the whole consists in a weak-eyed maudlin sensibility, and a certain vague random tunefulness of nature, is no separate faculty, no organ which can be <sup>15</sup> superadded to the rest, or disjoined from them ; but rather the result of their general harmony and completion. The feelings, the gifts that exist in the Poet are those that exist, with more or less development, in every human soul : the imagination, which shudders at the Hell <sup>20</sup> of Dante, is the same faculty, weaker in degree, which called that picture into being. How does the Poet speak to men, with power, but by being still more a man than they ? Shakspeare, it has been well observed, in the planning and completing of his tragedies, has shown an <sup>25</sup> Understanding, were it nothing more, which might have governed states, or indited a *Novum Organum*. What Burns's force of understanding may have been, we have less means of judging : it had to dwell among the

humblest objects; never saw Philosophy; never rose, except by natural effort and for short intervals, into the region of great ideas. Nevertheless, sufficient indication, if no proof sufficient, remains for us in his <sup>5</sup> works: we discern the brawny movements of a gigantic though untutored strength; and can understand how, in conversation, his quick sure insight into men and things may, as much as aught else about him, have amazed the best thinkers of his time and country.

<sup>10</sup> But, unless we mistake, the intellectual gift of Burns is fine as well as strong. The more delicate relations of things could not well have escaped his eye, for they were intimately present to his heart. The logic of the senate and the forum is indispensable, but not all-sufficient; nay, <sup>15</sup> perhaps the highest Truth is that which will the most certainly elude it. For this logic works by words, and "the highest," it has been said, "cannot be expressed in words." We are not without tokens of an openness for this higher truth also, of a keen though uncultivated sense <sup>20</sup> for it, having existed in Burns. Mr. Stewart, it will be remembered, "wonders," in the passage above quoted, that Burns had formed some distinct conception of the "doctrine of association." We rather think that far subtler things than the doctrine of association had from <sup>25</sup> of old been familiar to him. Here for instance:

"We know nothing," thus writes he, "or next to nothing, of the structure of our souls, so we cannot account for those seeming caprices in them, that one should be particularly pleased with this

thing, or struck with that, which, on minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the harebell, the foxglove, the wild-brier rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I 5 never hear the loud solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of gray plover in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery, which, 10 like the *Æolian* harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident; or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities: a God that made all things, man's immaterial and immortal nature, and a world of weal or woe beyond 15 death and the grave."

Force and fineness of understanding are often spoken of as something different from general force and fineness of nature, as something partly independent of them. The necessities of language so require it; but in truth these 20 qualities are not distinct and independent: except in special cases, and from special causes, they ever go together. A man of strong understanding is generally a man of strong character; neither is delicacy in the one kind often divided from delicacy in the other. No one, 25 at all events, is ignorant that in the Poetry of Burns keenness of insight keeps pace with keenness of feeling; that his *light* is not more pervading than his *warmth*. He is a man of the most impassioned temper; with passions not strong only, but noble, and of the sort in which great 30

virtues and great poems take their rise. It is reverence, it is love towards all Nature that inspires him, that opens his eyes to its beauty, and makes heart and voice eloquent in its praise. There is a true old saying, that 5 "Love furthers knowledge :" but above all, it is the living essence of that knowledge which makes poets ; the first principle of its existence, increase, activity. Of Burns's fervid affection, his generous all-embracing Love, we have spoken already, as of the grand distinction of 10 his nature, seen equally in word and deed, in his Life and in his Writings. It were easy to multiply examples. Not man only, but all that environs man in the material and moral universe, is lovely in his sight : "the hoary hawthorn," the "troop of gray plover," the "solitary curlew," all are dear to him ; all live in this Earth along with him, and to all he is knit as in mysterious brotherhood. How touching is it, for instance, that, amidst the gloom of personal misery, brooding over the wintry desolation without him and within him, he thinks of the 15 20 "ourie<sup>1</sup> cattle" and "silly sheep," and their sufferings in the pitiless storm !

<sup>1</sup> Shivering. <sup>2</sup> Noisy onset. <sup>3</sup> Sticking or sinking in mud.

<sup>4</sup> Scramble.      <sup>5</sup> Cliff.      <sup>6</sup> Every.

That in the merry months o' spring  
 Delighted me to hear thee sing,  
 What comes o' thee?  
 Where wilt thou cow'r thy chittering <sup>1</sup> wing,  
 And close thy ee? 5

The tenant of the mean hut, with its “ragged roof and chinky wall,” has a heart to pity even these! This is worth several homilies on Mercy; for it is the voice of Mercy herself. Burns, indeed, lives in sympathy; his soul rushes forth into all realms of being; nothing that <sup>10</sup> has existence can be indifferent to him. The very Devil he cannot hate with right orthodoxy:

But fare you weel, auld Nickie-ben;  
 O, wad ye tak a thought and men'!  
 Ye aiblins <sup>2</sup> might,— I dinna ken,— 15  
 Still hae a stake;  
 I'm wae <sup>3</sup> to think upo' yon den,  
 Even for your sake!

“*He* is the father of curses and lies,” said Dr. Slop; “and is cursed and damned already.”—“I am sorry for <sup>20</sup> it,” quoth my uncle Toby!—a Poet without Love were a physical and metaphysical impossibility.

But has it not been said, in contradiction to this principle, that “Indignation makes verses”? It has been so said, and is true enough: but the contradiction is apparent, not real. The Indignation which makes verses is, properly speaking, an inverted Love; the love of some right, some worth, some goodness, belonging to ourselves 25

<sup>1</sup> Trembling with cold.    <sup>2</sup> Perhaps.    <sup>3</sup> Sorrowful.

or others, which has been injured, and which this tempestuous feeling issues forth to defend and avenge. No selfish fury of heart, existing there as a primary feeling, and without its opposite, ever produced much Poetry: 5 otherwise, we suppose, the Tiger were the most musical of all our choristers. Johnson said, he loved a good hater; by which he must have meant, not so much one that hated violently, as one that hated wisely; hated baseness from love of nobleness. However, in spite of 10 Johnson's paradox, tolerable enough for once in speech, but which need not have been so often adopted in print since then, we rather believe that good men deal sparingly in hatred, either wise or unwise: nay, that a "good" hater is still a desideratum in this world. The 15 Devil, at least, who passes for the chief and best of that class, is said to be nowise an amiable character.

— Of the verses which Indignation makes, Burns has also given us specimens: and among the best that were ever given. Who will forget his *Dweller in yon Dungeon dark*; a piece that might have been chanted by the Furies of Æschylus? The secrets of the Infernal Pit are laid bare; a boundless baleful "darkness visible"; and streaks of hell-fire quivering madly in its black haggard bosom!

25

Dweller in yon Dungeon dark,  
Hangman of Creation, mark!  
Who in widow's weeds appears,  
Laden with unhonoured years,  
Noosing with care a bursting purse,  
Baited with many a deadly curse!

30

Why should we speak of *Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled*; since all know of it, from the king to the meanest of his subjects? This dithyrambic was composed on horseback; in riding in the middle of tempests, over the wildest Galloway moor, in company with a Mr. Syme, 5 who, observing the poet's looks, forbore to speak,—judiciously enough, for a man composing *Bruce's Address* might be unsafe to trifle with. Doubtless this stern hymn was singing itself, as he formed it, through the soul of Burns: but to the external ear, it should be sung with the 10 throat of the whirlwind. So long as there is warm blood in the heart of Scotchman or man, it will move in fierce thrills under this war-ode; the best, we believe, that was ever written by any pen.

Another wild stormful Song, that dwells in our ear and 15 mind with a strange tenacity, is *Macpherson's Farewell*. Perhaps there is something in the tradition itself that coöperates. For was not this grim Celt, this shaggy Northland Cacus, that “lived a life of *sturt*<sup>1</sup> and strife, and died by treacherie,”—was not he too one of the 20 Nimrods and Napoleons of the earth, in the arena of his own remote misty glens, for want of a clearer and wider one? Nay, was there not a touch of grace given him? A fibre of love and softness, of poetry itself, must have lived in his savage heart: for he composed that air the 25 night before his execution; on the wings of that poor melody his better soul would soar away above oblivion,

<sup>1</sup> Worry.

pain, and all the ignominy and despair, which, like an avalanche, was hurling him to the abyss ! Here also, as at Thebes, and in Pelops' line, was material Fate matched against man's Free-will ; matched in bitterest though obscure duel ; and the ethereal soul sank not, even in its blindness, without a cry which has survived it. But who, except Burns, could have given words to such a soul ; words that we never listen to without a strange half-barbarous, half-poetic fellow-feeling ?

10

*Sae rantingly,<sup>1</sup> sae wantonly,  
Sae dauntingly gaed he ;  
He play'd a spring, and danced it round,  
Below the gallows-tree.*

— Under a lighter disguise, the same principle of Love, which we have recognised as the great characteristic of Burns, and of all true poets, occasionally manifests itself in the shape of Humour. Everywhere, indeed, in his sunny moods, a full buoyant flood of mirth rolls through the mind of Burns ; he rises to the high, and stoops to the low, and is brother and playmate to all Nature. We speak not of his bold and often irresistible faculty of caricature ; for this is Drollery rather than Humour : but a much tenderer sportfulness dwells in him ; and comes forth here and there, in evanescent and beautiful touches ; as in his *Address to the Mouse*, or the *Farmer's Mare*, or in his *Elegy on poor Mailie*, which last may be reckoned his happiest effort of this kind. In these pieces there are

<sup>1</sup> Gleefully.

traits of a Humour as fine as that of Sterne ; yet altogether different, original, peculiar,—the Humour of Burns.

*Qualities of his poetry*

Of the tenderness, the playful pathos, and many other kindred qualities of Burns's Poetry, much more might be said ; but now, with these poor outlines of a sketch, we must prepare to quit this part of our subject. To speak of his individual Writings, adequately and with any detail, would lead us far beyond our limits. As already hinted, we can look on but few of these pieces as, in strict critical language, deserving the name of Poems : they are rhymed eloquence, rhymed pathos, rhymed sense ; yet seldom essentially melodious, aerial, poetical. *Tam o' Shanter* itself, which enjoys so high a favour, does not appear to us at all decisively to come under this last category. It is not so much a poem, as a piece of sparkling rhetoric ; the heart and body of the story still lies hard and dead. He has not gone back, much less carried us back, into that dark, earnest, wondering age, when the tradition was believed, and when it took its rise ; he does not attempt, by any new-modelling of his supernatural ware, to strike anew that deep mysterious chord of human nature, which once responded to such things ; and which lives in us too, and will forever live, though silent now, or vibrating with far other notes, and to far different issues. Our German readers will understand us, when we say, that he is not the Tieck but the Musäus of this tale. Externally it is all green and living ; yet look closer, it is no firm growth, but only ivy on a rock. The piece does not properly co-

here : the strange chasm which yawns in our incredulous imaginations between the Ayr public-house and the gate of Tophet, is nowhere bridged over, nay, the idea of such a bridge is laughed at ; and thus the Tragedy of the adventure becomes a mere drunken phantasmagoria, or many-coloured spectrum painted on ale-vapours, and the Farce alone has any reality. We do not say that Burns should have made much more of this tradition ; we rather think that, for strictly poetical purposes, not much ~~10~~ *was* to be made of it. Neither are we blind to the deep, varied, genial power displayed in what he has actually accomplished ; but we find far more "Shakspearean" qualities, as these of *Tam o' Shanter* have been fondly named, in many of his other pieces ; nay, we incline to ~~15~~ believe that this latter might have been written, all but quite as well, by a man who, in place of genius, had only possessed talent.

Perhaps we may venture to say, that the most strictly poetical of all his "poems" is one which does not appear ~~20~~ in Currie's Edition ; but has been often printed before and since, under the humble title of *The Jolly Beggars*. ~~The~~ The subject truly is among the lowest in nature ; but it only the more shows our Poet's gift in raising it into the domain of Art. To our minds, this piece seems ~~25~~ thoroughly compacted ; melted together, refined ; and poured forth in one flood of true *liquid* harmony. It is light, airy, soft of movement ; yet sharp and precise in its details ; every face is a portrait : that *raucle<sup>1</sup> carlin<sup>2</sup>*,

<sup>1</sup> Sturdy.

<sup>2</sup> Beldam.

that *wee Apollo*, that *Son of Mars*, are Scottish, yet ideal ; the scene is at once a dream, and the very Rag-castle of “ Poosie-Nansie.” Farther, it seems in a considerable degree complete, a real self-supporting Whole, which is the highest merit in a poem. The blanket of the Night is drawn asunder for a moment ; in full, ruddy, flaming light, these rough tatterdemalions are seen in their boisterous revel ; for the strong pulse of Life vindicates its right to gladness even here ; and when the curtain closes, we prolong the action, without effort ; the next day as the last, our *Caird*<sup>1</sup> and our *Balladmonger* are singing and soldiering ; their “ brats and callets ”<sup>2</sup> are hawking, begging, cheating ; and some other night, in new combinations, they will wring from Fate another hour of wassail and good cheer. Apart from the universal sympathy with man which this again bespeaks in Burns, a genuine inspiration and no inconsiderable technical talent are manifested here. There is the fidelity, humour, warm life, and accurate painting and grouping of some Teniers, for whom hostlers and carousing peasants are not without significance. It would be strange, doubtless, to call this the best of Burns’s writings : we mean to say only, that it seems to us the most perfect of its kind, as a piece of poetical composition, strictly so called. In the *Beggars’ Opera*, in the *Beggars’ Bush*, as other critics have already remarked, there is nothing which, in real poetic vigour, equals this

<sup>1</sup> Tinker.

<sup>2</sup> Loose women.

*Cantata*; nothing, as we think, which comes with ~~in~~ many degrees of it. *Poetry* ~~and~~ *burn*,

But by far the most finished, complete and truly inspired pieces of Burns are, without dispute, to be found among his *Songs*. It is here that, although through a small aperture, his light shines with least obstruction; in its highest beauty and pure sunny clearness. The reason may be, that Song is a brief simple species of composition; and requires nothing so much for its perfection as genuine poetic feeling, genuine music of heart. Yet the Song has its rules equally with the Tragedy; rules which in most cases are poorly fulfilled, in many cases are not so much as felt. We might write a long essay on the Songs of Burns; which we reckon by far the best that Britain has yet produced: for indeed, since the era of Queen Elizabeth, we know not that, by any other hand, aught truly worth attention has been accomplished in this department. True, we have songs enough "by persons of quality"; we have tawdry, hollow, wine-bred madrigals; many a rhymed speech "in the flowing and watery vein of Ossorius the Portugal Bishop," rich in sonorous words, and, for moral, dashed perhaps with some tint of a sentimental sensuality; all which many persons cease not from endeavouring to sing; (though for most part, we fear, the music is but from the throat outwards, or at best from some region far enough short of the *Soul*;) not in which, but in a certain inane Limbo of the Fancy, or even in some vaporous debateable-land on

the outskirts of the Nervous System, most of such madrigals and rhymed speeches seem to have originated.

With the Songs of Burns we must not name these things. Independently of the clear, manly, heartfelt sentiment that ever pervades *his* poetry, his Songs are honest ; in another point of view : in form, as well as in spirit.

They do not *affect* to be set to music, but they actually and in themselves are music ; they have received their life, and fashioned themselves together, in the medium of Harmony, as Venus rose from the bosom of the sea. The 10 story, the feeling, is not detailed, but suggested ; not *said*, or *spouted*, in rhetorical completeness and coherence ; but *sung*, in fitful gushes, in glowing hints, in fantastic breaks, in *warblings* not of the voice only, but of the whole mind. We consider this to be the essence of a 15 song ; and that no songs since the little careless catches, and as it were drops of song, which Shakspeare has here and there sprinkled over his plays, fulfil this condition in nearly the same degree as most of Burns's do. Such grace and truth of external movement, too, presupposes in general 20 a corresponding force and truth of sentiment and inward meaning. The Songs of Burns are not more perfect in the former quality than in the latter. With what tenderness he sings, yet with what vehemence and entireness ! There is a piercing wail in his sorrow, the purest rapture 25 in his joy ; he burns with the sternest ire, or laughs with the loudest or sliest mirth ; and yet he is sweet and soft, "sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet, and soft as their parting tear." If we farther take into account the

immense variety of his subjects; how, from the loud flowing revel in *Willie brew'd a Peck o' Maut*, to the still, rapt enthusiasm of sadness for *Mary in Heaven*; from the glad kind greeting of *Auld Langsyne*, or the comic <sup>5</sup>archness of *Duncan Gray*, to the fire-eyed fury of *Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled*, he has found a tone and words for every mood of man's heart, — it will seem a small praise if we rank him as the first of all our Song-writers; for we know not where to find one worthy of being second to him.

10 It is on his Songs, as we believe, that Burns's chief influence as an author will ultimately be found to depend: nor, if our Fletcher's aphorism is true, shall we account this a small influence. "Let me make the songs of a people," said he, "and you shall make its laws." Surely, 15 if ever any Poet might have equalled himself with Legislators on this ground, it was Burns. His Songs are already part of the mother-tongue, not of Scotland only but of Britain, and of the millions that in all ends of the earth speak a British language. In hut and hall, as the heart 20 unfolds itself in many-coloured joy and woe of existence, the *name*, the *voice* of that joy and that woe, is the name and voice which Burns has given them. Strictly speaking, perhaps no British man has so deeply affected the thoughts and feelings of so many men, as this solitary and altogether 25 private individual, with means apparently the humblest.

In another point of view, moreover, we incline to think that Burns's influence may have been considerable: we mean, as exerted specially on the Literature of his country, at least on the Literature of Scotland. Among the great

changes which British, particularly Scottish literature, has undergone since that period, one of the greatest will be found to consist in its remarkable increase of nationality. Even the English writers, most popular in Burns's time, were little distinguished for their literary patriotism, in this <sup>5</sup> best sense. A certain attenuated cosmopolitanism had, in good measure, taken place of the old insular home-feeling ; literature was, as it were, without any local environment ; was not nourished by the affections which spring from a native soil. Our Grays and Glovers seemed to write al- <sup>10</sup> most as if *in vacuo* ; the thing written bears no mark of place ; it is not written so much for Englishmen, as for men ; or rather, which is the inevitable result of this, for certain Generalisations which philosophy termed men. Goldsmith is an exception : not so Johnson ; the scene of <sup>15</sup> his *Rambler* is little more English than that of his *Rasselas*.

But if such was, in some degree, the case with England, it was, in the highest degree, the case with Scotland. In fact, our Scottish literature had, at that period, a very singular aspect ; unexampled, so far as we know, except <sup>20</sup> perhaps at Geneva, where the same state of matters appears still to continue. For a long period after Scotland became British, we had no literature : at the date when Addison and Steele were writing their *Spectators*, our good John Boston was writing, with the noblest intent, but <sup>25</sup> alike in defiance of grammar and philosophy, his *Fourfold State of Man*. Then came the schisms in our National Church, and the fiercer schisms in our Body Politic ; Theologic ink, and Jacobite blood, with gall enough in

both cases, seemed to have blotted out the intellect of the country: however, it was only obscured, not obliterated. Lord Kames made nearly the first attempt at writing English; and ere long, Hume, Robertson, Smith, and a whole host of followers, attracted hither the eyes of all Europe. And yet in this brilliant resuscitation of our "fervid genius," there was nothing truly Scottish, nothing indigenous; except, perhaps, the natural impetuosity of intellect, which we sometimes claim, and are sometimes upbraided with, as a characteristic of our nation. It is curious to remark that Scotland, so full of writers, had no Scottish culture, nor indeed any English; our culture was almost exclusively French. It was by studying Racine and Voltaire, Batteux and Boileau, that Kames had trained himself to be a critic and philosopher; it was the light of Montesquieu and Mably that guided Robertson in his political speculations; Quesnay's lamp that kindled the lamp of Adam Smith. Hume was too rich a man to borrow; and perhaps he reacted on the French more than he was acted on by them: but neither had he aught to do with Scotland; Edinburgh, equally with La Flèche, was but the lodging and laboratory, in which he not so much morally *lived*, as metaphysically *investigated*. Never, perhaps, was there a class of writers so clear and well-ordered, yet so totally destitute, to all appearance, of any patriotic affection, nay, of any human affection whatever. The French wits of the period were as unpatriotic: but their general deficiency in moral principle, not to say their avowed sensuality and unbelief in all

virtue, strictly so called, render this accountable enough. We hope there is a patriotism founded on something better than prejudice ; that our country may be dear to us, without injury to our philosophy ; that in loving and justly prizes all other lands, we may prize justly, and yet 5 love before all others, our own stern Motherland, and the venerable Structure of social and moral Life, which Mind has through long ages been building up for us there. Surely there is nourishment for the better part of man's heart in all this : surely the roots, that have fixed them- 10 selves in the very core of man's being, may be so cultivated as to grow up not into briers, but into roses, in the field of his life ! Our Scottish sages have no such propensities : the field of their life shows neither briers nor roses ; but only a flat, continuous thrashing-floor for 15 Logic, whereon all questions, from the "Doctrine of Rent" to the "Natural History of Religion," are thrashed and sifted with the same mechanical impartiality !

With Sir Walter Scott at the head of our literature, it cannot be denied that much of this evil is past, or 20 rapidly passing away : our chief literary men, whatever other faults they may have, no longer live among us like a French Colony, or some knot of Propaganda Missionaries ; but like natural-born subjects of the soil, partaking and sympathising in all our attachments, humours, and 25 habits. Our literature no longer grows in water but in mould, and with the true racy virtues of the soil and climate. How much of this change may be due to Burns, or to any other individual, it might be difficult to estimate.

Direct literary imitation of Burns was not to be looked for. But his example, in the fearless adoption of domestic subjects, could not but operate from afar ; and certainly in no heart did the love of country ever burn with a warmer glow than in that of Burns : “a tide of Scottish prejudice,” as he modestly calls this deep and generous feeling, “had been poured along his veins ; and he felt that it would boil there till the flood-gates shut in eternal rest.” It seemed to him, as if *he* could do so little for his country, and yet would so gladly have done all. One small province stood open for him,—that of Scottish Song ; and how eagerly he entered on it, how devotedly he laboured there ! In his toilsome journeyings, this object never quits him ; it is the little happy-valley of his careworn heart. In the gloom of his own affliction, he eagerly searches after some lonely brother of the muse, and rejoices to snatch one other name from the oblivion that was covering it ! These were early feelings, and they abode with him to the end :

20                    . . . A wish (I mind its power),  
 A wish, that to my latest hour  
 Will strongly heave my breast,—  
 That I, for poor auld Scotland’s sake,  
 Some useful plan or book could make,  
 Or sing a sang at least.

25                    The rough bur Thistle spreading wide  
 Amang the bearded bear,<sup>1</sup>  
 I turn’d my weeding-clips<sup>2</sup> aside,  
 And spared the symbol dear.

<sup>1</sup> Barley.

<sup>2</sup> Shears.

But to leave the mere literary character of Burns, which has already detained us too long. Far more interesting than any of his written works, as it appears to us, are his acted ones: the Life he willed and was fated to lead among his fellow-men. ( These Poems are but like, little rhymed fragments scattered here and there in the grand unrhymed Romance of his earthly existence ) and it is only when intercalated in this at their proper places, that they attain their full measure of significance. And this, too, alas, was but a fragment ! The plan of a mighty <sup>10</sup> edifice had been sketched ; some columns, porticos, firm masses of building, stand completed ; the rest more or less clearly indicated ; with many a far-stretching tendency, which only studious and friendly eyes can now trace towards the purposed termination. For the work is <sup>15</sup> broken off in the middle, almost in the beginning ; and rises among us, beautiful and sad, at once unfinished and a ruin ! If charitable judgment was necessary in estimating his Poems, and justice required that the aim and the manifest power to fulfil it must often be accepted for the <sup>20</sup> fulfilment ; much more is this the case in regard to his Life, the sum and result of all his endeavours, where his difficulties came upon him not in detail only, but in mass ; and so much has been left unaccomplished, nay, was mistaken, and altogether marred. <sup>25</sup>

Properly speaking, there is but one era in the life of Burns, and that the earliest. We have not youth and manhood, but only youth : for, to the end, we discern no decisive change in the complexion of his character ; in his

— thirty-seventh year, he is still, as it were in youth. With all that resoluteness of judgment, that penetrating insight, and singular maturity of intellectual power, exhibited in his writings, he never attains to any clearness regarding 5 himself ; to the last, he never ascertains his peculiar aim, even with such distinctness as is common among ordinary men ; and therefore never can pursue it with that singleness of will, which insures success and some contentment to such men. To the last, he wavers between two pur-  
10 poses : glorying in his talent, like a true poet, he yet can-  
not consent to make this his chief and sole glory, and to follow it as the one thing needful, through poverty or riches, through good or evil report. Another far meaner ambition still cleaves to him ; he must dream and  
15 struggle about a certain "Rock of Independence" ; which, natural and even admirable as it might be, was still but a warring with the world, on the comparatively insignificant ground of his being more completely or less completely supplied with money than others ; of his  
20 standing at a higher or at a lower altitude in a general estimation than others. For the world still appears to him, as to the young, in borrowed colours : he expects from it what it cannot give to any man ; seeks for con-  
tentment, not within himself, in action and wise effort, but  
25 from without, in the kindness of circumstances, in love, friendship, honour, pecuniary ease. He would be happy, not actively and in himself, but passively and from some ideal cornucopia of Enjoyments, not earned by his own labour, but showered on him by the beneficence of



Destiny. Thus, like a young man, he cannot gird himself up for any worthy well-calculated goal, but swerves to and fro, between passionate hope and remorseful disappointment: rushing onwards with a deep tempestuous force, he surmounts or breaks asunder many a barrier; travels, 5 nay, advances far, but advancing only under uncertain guidance, is ever and anon turned from his path; and to the last cannot reach the only true happiness of a man, that of clear decided Activity in the sphere for which, by nature and circumstances, he has been fitted and appointed. 10

We do not say these things in dispraise of Burns; nay, perhaps, they but interest us the more in his favour. This blessing is not given soonest to the best; but rather, it is often the greatest minds that are latest in obtaining it; for where most is to be developed, most time may be 15 required to develop it. A complex condition had been assigned him from without; as complex a condition from within: no "preëstablished harmony" existed between the clay soil of Mossiel and the empyrean soul of Robert Burns; it was not wonderful that the adjustment between 20 them should have been long postponed, and his arm long cumbered, and his sight confused, in so vast and discordant an economy as he had been appointed steward over. Byron was, at his death, but a year younger than Burns; and through life, as it might have appeared, far more 25 simply situated: yet in him too we can trace no such adjustment, no such moral manhood; but at best, and only a little before his end, the beginning of what seemed such.

By much the most striking incident in Burns's Life

is his journey to Edinburgh ; but perhaps a still more important one is his residence at Irvine, so early as in his twenty-third year. Hitherto his life had been poor and toilworn ; but otherwise not ungenial, and, with all its 5 distresses, by no means unhappy. In his parentage, deducting outward circumstances, he had every reason to reckon himself fortunate. His father was a man of thoughtful, intense, earnest character, as the best of our peasants are ; valuing knowledge, possessing some, and 10 what is far better and rarer, openminded for more : a man with a keen insight and devout heart ; reverent towards God, friendly therefore at once, and fearless towards all that God has made : in one word, though but a hard-handed peasant, a complete and fully unfolded *Man*. 15 Such a father is seldom found in any rank in society ; and was worth descending far in society to seek. Unfortunately, he was very poor ; had he been even a little richer, almost never so little, the whole might have issued far otherwise. Mighty events turn on a straw ; the crossing 20 of a brook decides the conquest of the world. Had this William Burns's small seven acres of nursery-ground anywise prospered, the boy Robert had been sent to school ; had struggled forward, as so many weaker men do, to some university ; come forth not as a rustic wonder, 25 but as a regular well-trained intellectual workman, and changed the whole course of British Literature, — for it lay in him to have done this ! But the nursery did not prosper ; poverty sank his whole family below the help of even our cheap school-system : Burns remained a hard-

worked ploughboy, and British literature took its own course. Nevertheless, even in this rugged scene there is much to nourish him. If he drudges, it is with his brother, and for his father and mother, whom he loves, and would fain shield from want. Wisdom is not banished 5 from their poor hearth, nor the balm of natural feeling: the solemn words, *Let us worship God*, are heard there from a “priest-like father”; if threatenings of unjust men throw mother and children into tears, these are tears not of grief only, but of holiest affection; every heart in 10 that humble group feels itself the closer knit to every other; in their hard warfare they are there together, a “little band of brethren.” Neither are such tears, and the deep beauty that dwells in them, their only portion. Light visits the hearts as it does the eyes of all living: 15 there is a force, too, in this youth, that enables him to trample on misfortune; nay, to bind it under his feet to make him sport. For a bold, warm, buoyant humour of character has been given him; and so the thick-coming shapes of evil are welcomed with a gay, friendly irony, and 20 in their closest pressure he bates no jot of heart or hope. Vague yearnings of ambition fail not, as he grows up; dreamy fancies hang like cloud-cities around him; the curtain of Existence is slowly rising, in many-coloured splendour and gloom: and the auroral light of first love 25 is gilding his horizon, and the music of song is on his path; and so he walks

. . . . in glory and in joy,  
Behind his plough, upon the mountain side.

We ourselves know, from the best evidence, that up to this date Burns was happy ; nay, that he was the gayest, brightest, most fantastic, fascinating being to be found in the world ; more so even than he ever afterwards appeared. But now, at this early age, he quits the paternal roof; goes forth into looser, louder, more exciting society ; and becomes initiated in those dissipations, those vices, which a certain class of philosophers have asserted to be a natural preparative for entering on active life ; a kind of mud-bath, in which the youth is, as it were, necessitated to steep, and, we suppose, cleanse himself, before the real toga of Manhood can be laid on him. We shall not dispute much with this class of philosophers ; we hope they are mistaken : for Sin and Remorse so easily beset us at all stages of life, and are always such indifferent company, that it seems hard we should, at any stage, be forced and fated not only to meet but to yield to them, and even serve for a term in their leprous armada. We hope it is not so. Clear we are, at all events, it cannot be the training one receives in this Devil's service, but only our determining to desert from it, that fits us for true manly Action. We become men, not after we have been dissipated, and disappointed in the chase of false pleasure ; but after we have ascertained, in any way, what impassable barriers hem us in through this life ; how mad it is to hope for contentment to our infinite soul from the *gifts* of this extremely finite world ; that a man must be sufficient for himself ; and that for suffering and enduring there is no remedy but

striving and doing. Manhood begins when we have in any way made truce with Necessity ; begins even when we have surrendered to Necessity, as the most part only do ; but begins joyfully and hopefully only when we have reconciled ourselves to Necessity ; and thus, in reality, 5 triumphed over it, and felt that in Necessity we are free. Surely, such lessons as this last, which, in one shape or other, is the grand lesson for every mortal man, are better learned from the lips of a devout mother, in the looks and actions of a devout father, while the heart is yet soft 10 and pliant, than in collision with the sharp adamant of Fate, attracting us to shipwreck us, when the heart is grown hard, and may he broken before it will become contrite. Had Burns continued to learn this, as he was already learning it, in his father's cottage, he would have 15 learned it fully, which he never did ; and been saved many a lasting aberration, many a bitter hour and year of remorseful sorrow.

It seems to us another circumstance of fatal import in Burns's history, that at this time too he became involved 20 in the religious quarrels of his district ; that he was enlisted and feasted, as the fighting man of the New-Light Priesthood, in their highly unprofitable warfare. At the tables of these free-minded clergy he learned much more than was needful for him. Such liberal ridicule of fa- 25 fanaticism awakened in his mind scruples about Religion itself ; and a whole world of Doubts, which it required quite another set of conjurors than these men to exorcise. We do not say that such an intellect as his could have

escaped similar doubts at some period of his history ; or even that he could, at a later period, have come through them altogether victorious and unharmed : but it seems peculiarly unfortunate that this time, above all others, 5 should have been fixed for the encounter. For now, with principles assailed by evil example from without, by “passions raging like demons” from within, he had little need of skeptical misgivings to whisper treason in the heat of the battle, or to cut off his retreat if he were 10 already defeated. He loses his feeling of innocence ; his mind is at variance with itself ; the old divinity no longer presides there ; but wild Desires and wild Repentance alternately oppress him. Ere long, too, he has committed himself before the world ; his character for sobriety, 15 dear to a Scottish peasant as few corrupted worldlings can even conceive, is destroyed in the eyes of men ; and his only refuge consists in trying to disbelieve his guiltiness, and is but a refuge of lies. The blackest desperation now gathers over him, broken only by red lightnings of 20 remorse. The whole fabric of his life is blasted asunder ; for now not only his character, but his personal liberty, is to be lost ; men and Fortune are leagued for his hurt ; “hungry Ruin has him in the wind.” He sees no escape but the saddest of all : exiled from 25 his loved country, to a country in every sense inhospitable and abhorrent to him. While the “gloomy night is gathering fast,” in mental storm and solitude, as well as in physical, he sings his wild farewell to Scotland :

Farewell, my friends ; farewell, my foes !  
My peace with these, my love with those :  
The bursting tears my heart declare ;  
Adieu, my native banks of Ayr !

Light breaks suddenly in on him in floods ; but still a 5  
false transitory light, and no real sunshine. He is invited  
to Edinburgh ; hastens thither with anticipating heart ; is  
welcomed as in a triumph, and with universal blandish-  
ment and acclamation ; whatever is wisest, whatever is  
greatest or loveliest there, gathers round him, to gaze on 10  
his face, to show him honour, sympathy, affection. Burns's  
appearance among the sages and nobles of Edinburgh  
must be regarded as one of the most singular phenomena  
in modern Literature ; almost like the appearance of  
some Napoleon among the crowned sovereigns of mod- 15  
ern Politics. For it is nowise as "a mockery king," set  
there by favour, transiently and for a purpose, that he will  
let himself be treated ; still less is he a mad Rienzi, whose  
sudden elevation turns his too weak head : but he stands  
there on his own basis ; cool, unastonished, holding his 20  
equal rank from Nature herself ; putting forth no claim  
which there is not strength *in* him, as well as about him,  
to vindicate. Mr. Lockhart has some forcible observa-  
tions on this point :

"It needs no effort of imagination," says he, "to conceive what 25  
the sensations of an isolated set of scholars (almost all either clergymen  
or professors) must have been in the presence of this big-  
boned, black-browed, brawny stranger, with his great flashing eyes,  
who, having forced his way among them from the plough-tail at a

single stride, manifested in the whole strain of his bearing and conversation a most thorough conviction, that in the society of the most eminent men of his nation he was exactly where he was entitled to be ; hardly deigned to flatter them by exhibiting even 5 an occasional symptom of being flattered by their notice ; by turns calmly measured himself against the most cultivated understandings of his time in discussion ; overpowered the *bon-mots* of the most celebrated convivialists by broad floods of merriment, impregnated with all the burning life of genius ; astounded bosoms habitually 10 enveloped in the thrice-piled folds of social reserve, by compelling them to tremble,—nay, to tremble visibly,—beneath the fearless touch of natural pathos ; and all this without indicating the smallest willingness to be ranked among those professional ministers of excitement, who are content to be paid in money and smiles for 15 doing what the spectators and auditors would be ashamed of doing in their own persons, even if they had the power of doing it ; and last, and probably worst of all, who was known to be in the habit of enlivening societies which they would have scorned to approach, still more frequently than their own, with eloquence no less magnificent ; with wit, in all likelihood still more daring ; often enough, 20 as the superiors whom he fronted without alarm might have guessed from the beginning, and had ere long no occasion to guess, with wit pointed at themselves."

The farther we remove from this scene, the more singular will it seem to us : details of the exterior aspect of it are already full of interest. Most readers recollect Mr. Walker's personal interviews with Burns as among the best passages of his Narrative : a time will come when this reminiscence of Sir Walter Scott's, slight though it is, 25 will also be precious :

"As for Burns," writes Sir Walter, "I may truly say, *Virgilium vidi tantum*. I was a lad of fifteen in 1786-7, when he came first

to Edinburgh, but had sense and feeling enough to be much interested in his poetry, and would have given the world to know him : but I had very little acquaintance with any literary people, and still less with the gentry of the west country, the two sets that he most frequented. Mr. Thomas Grierson was at that time a clerk of my father's. He knew Burns, and promised to ask him to his lodgings to dinner ; but had no opportunity to keep his word ; otherwise I might have seen more of this distinguished man. As it was, I saw him one day at the late venerable Professor Ferguson's, where there were several gentlemen of literary reputation, among whom I remember the celebrated Mr. Dugald Stewart. Of course, we youngsters sat silent, looked and listened. The only thing I remember which was remarkable in Burns's manner, was the effect produced upon him by a print of Bunbury's, representing a soldier lying dead on the snow, his dog sitting in misery on one side, — on the other, his widow, with a child in her arms. These lines were written beneath :

“Cold on Canadian hills, or Minden’s plain,  
Perhaps that mother wept her soldier slain ;  
Bent o'er her babe, her eye dissolved in dew,  
The big drops mingling with the milk he drew,      20  
Gave the sad presage of his future years,  
The child of misery baptised in tears.”

“Burns seemed much affected by the print, or rather by the ideas which it suggested to his mind. He actually shed tears. He asked whose the lines were ; and it chanced that nobody but myself remembered that they occur in a half-forgotten poem of Langhorne’s called by the unpromising title of ‘The Justice of Peace.’ I whispered my information to a friend present ; he mentioned it to Burns, who rewarded me with a look and a word, which, though of mere civility, I then received and still recollect with very great pleasure.

“His person was strong and robust ; his manners rustic, not

clownish ; a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity, which received part of its effect perhaps from one's knowledge of his extraordinary talents. His features are represented in Mr. Nasmyth's picture : but to me it conveys the idea that they are diminished, as if seen in perspective. I think his countenance was more massive than it looks in any of the portraits. I should have taken the poet, had I not known what he was, for a very sagacious country farmer of the old Scotch school, *i.e.* none of your modern agriculturists who keep labourers for their drudgery, but the *douce<sup>1</sup> gudeman<sup>2</sup>* who held his own plough. There was a strong expression of sense and shrewdness in all his lineaments ; the eye alone, I think, indicated the poetical character and temperament. It was large, and of a dark cast, which glowed (I say literally *glowed*) when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men of my time. His conversation expressed perfect self-confidence, without the slightest presumption. Among the men who were the most learned of their time and country, he expressed himself with perfect firmness, but without the least intrusive forwardness ; and when he differed in opinion, he did not hesitate to express it firmly, yet at the same time with modesty. I do not remember any part of his conversation distinctly enough to be quoted ; nor did I ever see him again, except in the street, where he did not recognise me, as I could not expect he should. He was much caressed in Edinburgh : but (considering what literary emoluments have been since his day) the efforts made for his relief were extremely trifling.

"I remember, on this occasion I mention, I thought Burns's acquaintance with English poetry was rather limited ; and also that, having twenty times the abilities of Allan Ramsay and of Ferguson, he talked of them with too much humility as his models : there was doubtless national predilection in his estimate.

"This is all I can tell you about Burns. I have only to add,

<sup>1</sup> Sedate.

<sup>2</sup> Man of the house.

that his dress corresponded with his manner. He was like a farmer dressed in his best to dine with the laird. I do not speak *in malam partem*, when I say, I never saw a man in company with his superiors in station or information more perfectly free from either the reality or the affectation of embarrassment. I was told, but did not observe it, that his address to females was extremely deferential, and always with a turn either to the pathetic or humorous, which engaged their attention particularly. I have heard the late Duchess of Gordon remark this. — I do not know anything I can add to these recollections of forty years since." 10

The conduct of Burns under this dazzling blaze of favour ; the calm, unaffected, manly manner in which he not only bore it, but estimated its value, has justly been regarded as the best proof that could be given of his real vigour and integrity of mind. A little natural vanity, some 15 touches of hypocritical modesty, some glimmerings of affectation, at least some fear of being thought affected, we could have pardoned in almost any man ; but no such indication is to be traced here. In his unexampled situation the young peasant is not a moment perplexed ; so 20 many strange lights do not confuse him, do not lead him astray. Nevertheless, we cannot but perceive that this winter did him great and lasting injury. A somewhat clearer knowledge of men's affairs, scarcely of their characters, it did afford him ; but a sharper feeling of Fortune's unequal arrangements in their social destiny is 25 also left with him. He had seen the gay and gorgeous arena, in which the powerful are born to play their parts ; nay, had himself stood in the midst of it ; and he felt more bitterly than ever, that here he was but a looker-on, and 30

had no part or lot in that splendid game. From this time a jealous indignant fear of social degradation takes possession of him ; and perverts, so far as aught could pervert, his private contentment, and his feelings towards his richer fellows. It was clear to Burns that he had talent enough to make a fortune, or a hundred fortunes, could he but have rightly willed this ; it was clear also that he willed something far different, and therefore could not make one. Unhappy it was that he had not power to choose the one, and reject the other ; but must halt forever between two opinions, two objects ; making hampered advancement towards either. But so it is with many men : we " long for the merchandise, yet would fain keep the price ;" and so stand chaffering with Fate, in vexatious altercation, till the night come, and our fair is over !

The Edinburgh Learned of that period were in general more noted for clearness of head than for warmth of heart : with the exception of the good old Blacklock, whose help was too ineffectual, scarcely one among them seems to have looked at Burns with any true sympathy, or indeed much otherwise than as at a highly curious *thing*. By the great also he is treated in the customary fashion ; entertained at their tables and dismissed : certain modica of pudding and praise are, from time to time, gladly exchanged for the fascination of his presence ; which exchange once effected, the bargain is finished, and each party goes his several way. At the *end of this strange season*, Burns gloomily sums up his

gains and losses, and meditates on the chaotic future. In money he is somewhat richer ; in fame and the show of happiness, infinitely richer ; but in the substance of it, as poor as ever. Nay, poorer ; for his heart is now maddened still more with the fever of worldly Ambition ; and 5 — through long years the disease will rack him with unprofitable sufferings, and weaken his strength for all true and nobler aims.

What Burns was next to do or to avoid ; how a man so circumstanced was now to guide himself towards his 10 true advantage, might at this point of time have been a question for the wisest. It was a question too, which apparently he was left altogether to answer for himself : of his learned or rich patrons it had not struck any individual to turn a thought on this so trivial matter. With- 15 out claiming for Burns the praise of perfect sagacity, we must say, that his Excise and Farm scheme does not seem to us a very unreasonable one ; that we should be at a loss, even now, to suggest one decidedly better. Certain of his admirers have felt scandalised at his ever 20 resolving to *gauge* ; and would have had him lie at the pool, till the spirit of Patronage stirred the waters, that so, with one friendly plunge, all his sorrows might be healed. Unwise counsellors ! They know not the manner of this spirit ; and how, in the lap of most golden 25 dreams, a man might have happiness, were it not that in the interim he must die of hunger ! It reflects credit on the manliness and sound sense of Burns, that he felt — so early on what ground he was standing ; and preferred

self-help, on the humblest scale, to dependence and inaction, though with hope of far more splendid possibilities. But even these possibilities were not rejected in his scheme: he might expect, if it chanced that he *had* any friend, to rise, in no long period, into something even like opulence and leisure; while again, if it chanced that he had no friend, he could still live in security; and for the rest, he "did not intend to borrow honour from any profession." We reckon that his plan was honest and well-calculated: all turned on the execution of it. Doubtless it failed; yet not, we believe, from any vice inherent in itself. Nay, after all, it was no failure of external means, but of internal, that overtook Burns. His was no bankruptcy of the purse, but of the soul; to his last day, he owed no man anything.

Meanwhile he begins well: with two good and wise actions. His donation to his mother, munificent from a man whose income had lately been seven pounds a-year, was worthy of him, and not more than worthy. Generous also, and worthy of him, was the treatment of the woman whose life's welfare now depended on his pleasure. A friendly observer might have hoped serene days for him: his mind is on the true road to peace with itself: what clearness he still wants will be given as he proceeds; for the best teacher of duties, that still lie dim to us, is the Practice of those we see and have at hand. Had the "patrons of genius," who could give him nothing, but taken nothing from him, at least nothing more! The *wounds* of his heart would have healed, vulgar ambition

would have died away. Toil and Frugality would have been welcome, since Virtue dwelt with them ; and Poetry would have shone through them as of old : and in her clear ethereal light, which was his own by birthright, he might have looked down on his earthly destiny, and all, its obstructions, not with patience only, but with love.

But the patrons of genius would not have it so. Picturesque tourists,<sup>1</sup> all manner of fashionable dandlers after literature, and, far worse, all manner of convivial Mæcenases, hovered round him in his retreat ; and his good as well as his weak qualities secured them influence over him. He was flattered by their notice ; and his warm social nature made it impossible for him to shake them off, and hold on his way apart from them. These

<sup>1</sup> There is one little sketch by certain "English gentlemen" of 15 this class, which, though adopted in Currie's Narrative, and since then repeated in most others, we have all along felt an invincible disposition to regard as imaginary : "On a rock that projected into the stream, they saw a man employed in angling, of a singular appearance. He had a cap made of fox-skin on his head, a loose 20 greatcoat fixed round him by a belt, from which depended an enormous Highland broad-sword. It was Burns." Now, we rather think, it was *not* Burns. For, to say nothing of the fox-skin cap, the loose and quite Hibernian watchcoat with the belt, what are we to make of this "enormous Highland broad-sword" depending 25 from him? More especially, as there is no word of parish constables on the outlook to see whether, as Dennis phrases it, he had an eye to his own midriff or that of the public! Burns, of all men, had the least need, and the least tendency, to seek for distinction, either in his own eyes, or those of others, by such poor mum- 30 meries.—(*Carlyle's note.*)

men, as we believe, were proximately the means of his ruin. Not that they meant him any ill ; they only meant themselves a little good ; if he suffered harm, let *him* look to it ! But they wasted his precious time and his precious talent ; they disturbed his composure, broke down his returning habits of temperance and assiduous contented exertion. Their pampering was baneful to him ; their cruelty, which soon followed, was equally baneful. The old grudge against Fortune's inequality awoke with new bitterness in their neighbourhood ; and Burns had no retreat but to "the Rock of Independence," which is but an air-castle after all, that looks well at a distance, but will screen no one from real wind and wet. Flushed with irregular excitement, exasperated alternately by ✓ *15* tempt of others, and contempt of himself, Burns was no longer regaining his peace of mind, but fast losing it forever. There was a hollowness at the heart of his life, for his conscience did not now approve what he was doing.

*20* Amid the vapours of unwise enjoyment, of bootless remorse, and angry discontent with Fate, his true loadstar, a life of Poetry, with Poverty, nay with Famine if it must be so, was too often altogether hidden from his eyes. And yet he sailed a sea, where without some such loadstar there *25* was no right steering. Meteors of French Politics rise before him, but these were not *his* stars. An accident this, which hastened, but did not originate, his worst distresses. In the mad contentions of that time, he comes in collision with certain official Superiors ; is wounded by

them ; cruelly lacerated, we should say, could a dead mechanical implement, in any case, be called cruel : and shrinks, in indignant pain, into deeper self-seclusion, into gloomier moodiness than ever. His life has now lost its unity : it is a life of fragments ; led with little aim, beyond the melancholy one of securing its own continuance, — in fits of wild false joy when such offered, and of black despondency when they passed away. His character before the world begins to suffer : calumny is busy with him ; for a miserable man makes more enemies than friends. Some faults he has fallen into, and a thousand misfortunes ; but deep criminality is what he stands accused of, and they that are *not* without sin cast the first stone at him ! For is he not a well-wisher to the French Revolution, a Jacobin, and therefore in that one act guilty of all ? These accusations, political and moral, it has since appeared, were false enough : but the world hesitated little to credit them. Nay, his convivial Mæcenases themselves were not the last to do it. There is reason to believe that, in his later years, the Dumfries Aristocracy had partly withdrawn themselves from Burns, as from a tainted person, no longer worthy of their acquaintance. That painful class, stationed, in all provincial cities, behind the outmost breastwork of Gentility, there to stand siege and do battle against the intrusions of Grocerdom and Grazierdom, had actually seen dishonour in the society of Burns, and branded him with their veto ; had, as we vulgarly say, *cut* him ! We find one passage in this Work of Mr. Lockhart's, which will not out of our thoughts :

“A gentleman of that county, whose name I have already more than once had occasion to refer to, has often told me that he was seldom more grieved, than when riding into Dumfries one fine summer evening about this time to attend a county ball, he saw 5 Burns walking alone, on the shady side of the principal street of the town, while the opposite side was gay with successive groups of gentlemen and ladies, all drawn together for the festivities of the night, not one of whom appeared willing to recognise him. The horseman dismounted, and joined Burns, who on his proposing to 10 cross the street said: ‘Nay, nay, my young friend, that’s all over now;’ and quoted, after a pause, some verses of Lady Grizzel Bailie’s pathetic ballad:

15                   “ ‘ His bonnet stood ance fu’ fair on his brow,  
                   His auld ane look’d better than mony ane’s new;  
                   But now he lets ’t wear ony way it will hing,  
                   And casts himsell dowie<sup>1</sup> upon the corn-bing.<sup>2</sup>

20                   “ ‘ O, were we young as we ance hae been,  
                   We sud hae been gallopping down on yon green,  
                   And linking<sup>3</sup> it ower the lily-white lea!  
                   And werena my heart light, I wad die.’

It was little in Burns’s character to let his feelings on certain subjects escape in this fashion. He, immediately after reciting these verses, assumed the sprightliness of his most pleasing manner; and taking his young friend home with him, entertained him very agreeably till the hour of the ball arrived.”

Alas! when we think that Burns now sleeps “where bitter indignation can no longer lacerate his heart,”<sup>4</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> Mournfully.           <sup>2</sup> Corn-heap.           <sup>3</sup> Trip or dance.

<sup>4</sup> *Ubi sæva indignatio cor ultius lacerare nequit.*   Swift’s Epitaph. — (Carlyle’s note.)

that most of those fair dames and frizzled gentlemen already lie at his side, where the breastwork of gentility is quite thrown down,— who would not sigh over the thin delusions and foolish toys that divide heart from heart, and make man unmerciful to his brother ! 5

It was not now to be hoped that the genius of Burns would ever reach maturity, or accomplish aught worthy of itself. His spirit was jarred in its melody ; not the soft breath of natural feeling, but the rude hand of Fate, was now sweeping over the strings. And yet what 10 harmony was in him, what music even in his discords ! How the wild tones had a charm for the simplest and the wisest ; and all men felt and knew that here also was one of the Gifted ! “ If he entered an inn at midnight, after all the inmates were in bed, the news of his arrival 15 circulated from the cellar to the garret ; and ere ten minutes had elapsed, the landlord and all his guests were assembled ! ” Some brief, pure moments of poetic life were yet appointed him, in the composition of his Songs. We can understand how he grasped at this employ-20 ment ; and how, too, he spurned all other reward for it but what the labour itself brought him. For the soul of Burns, though scathed and marred, was yet living in its full moral strength, though sharply conscious of its errors and abasement : and here, in his destitution and degra-25 dation, was one act of seeming nobleness and self devotedness left even for him to perform. He felt too, that with all the “ thoughtless follies ” that had “ laid him low,” the world was unjust and cruel to him ; and he silently

appealed to another and calmer time. Not as a hired soldier, but as a patriot, would he strive for the glory of his country: so he cast from him the poor sixpence a-day, and served zealously as a volunteer. Let us not 5 grudge him this last luxury of his existence; let him not have appealed to us in vain! The money was not necessary to him; he struggled through without it: long since, these guineas would have been gone, and now the high-mindedness of refusing them will plead for him in 10 all hearts forever.

We are here arrived at the crisis of Burns's life; for matters had now taken such a shape with him as could not long continue. If improvement was not to be looked for, Nature could only for a limited time maintain this 15 dark and maddening warfare against the world and itself.

We are not medically informed whether any continuance of years was, at this period, probable for Burns; whether his death is to be looked on as in some sense an accidental event, or only as the natural consequence 20 of the long series of events that had preceded. The latter seems to be the likelier opinion; and yet it is by no means a certain one. At all events, as we have said, *some* change could not be very distant. Three gates of deliverance, it seems to us, were open for Burns: clear 25 poetical activity; madness; or death. The first, with longer life, was still possible, though not probable; for physical causes were beginning to be concerned in it: and yet Burns had an iron resolution; could he but have seen and felt, that not only his highest glory, but

his first duty, and the true medicine for all his woes, lay here. The second was still less probable ; for his mind was ever among the clearest and firmest. So the milder third gate was opened for him : and he passed, not softly yet speedily, into that still country, where the hail-<sup>5</sup> storms and fire-showers do not reach, and the heaviest-laden wayfarer at length lays down his load !

Contemplating this sad end of Burns, and how he sank unaided by any real help, uncheered by any wise sympathy, generous minds have sometimes figured to themselves, with a reproachful sorrow, that much might have been done for him ; that by counsel, true affection and friendly ministrations, he might have been saved to himself and the world. We question whether there is not more tenderness of heart than soundness of judgment in <sup>10</sup> these suggestions. It seems dubious to us whether the richest, wisest, most benevolent individual could have lent Burns any effectual help. Counsel, which seldom profits any one, he did not need ; in his understanding, he knew the right from the wrong, as well perhaps as any <sup>15</sup> man ever did ; but the persuasion, which would have availed him, lies not so much in the head as in the heart, where no argument or expostulation could have assisted much to implant it. As to money again, we do not believe that this was his essential want ; or well see how any <sup>20</sup> private man could, even presupposing Burns's consent, have bestowed on him an independent fortune, with much prospect of decisive advantage. It is a mortifying truth,

that two men, in any rank of society, could hardly be found virtuous enough to give money, and to take it as a necessary gift, without injury to the moral entireness of one or both. But so stands the fact : Friendship, in the old heroic sense of that term, no longer exists ; except in the cases of kindred or other legal affinity, it is in reality no longer expected, or recognised as a virtue among men. A close observer of manners has pronounced "Patronage," that is, pecuniary or other economic furtherance, to be "twice cursed" ; cursing him that gives, and him that takes ! And thus, in regard to outward matters also, it has become the rule, as in regard to inward it always was and must be the rule, that no one shall look for effectual help to another ; but that each shall rest contented with what help he can afford himself. Such, we say, is the principle of modern Honour ; naturally enough growing out of that sentiment of Pride, which we inculcate and encourage as the basis of our whole social morality. Many a poet has been poorer than Burns ; but no one was ever prouder : we may question whether, without great precautions, even a pension from Royalty would not have galled and encumbered, more than actually assisted him.

Still less, therefore, are we disposed to join with another class of Burns's admirers, who accuse the higher ranks among us of having ruined Burns by their selfish neglect of him. We have already stated our doubts whether direct pecuniary help, had it been offered, would have been accepted, or could have proved very effectual. We shall readily admit, however, that much was to be done for

Burns ; that many a poisoned arrow might have been warded from his bosom ; many an entanglement in his path cut asunder by the hand of the powerful ; and light and heat, shed on him from high places, would have made his humble atmosphere more genial ; and the soft-<sup>5</sup>est heart then breathing might have lived and died with some fewer pangs. Nay, we shall grant farther, and for Burns it is granting much, that, with all his pride, he would have thanked, even with exaggerated gratitude, any one who had cordially befriended him : patronage, unless <sup>10</sup>once cursed, needed not to have been twice so. At all events, the poor promotion he desired in his calling might have been granted : it was his own scheme, therefore likelier than any other to be of service. All this it might have been a luxury, nay, it was a duty, for our <sup>15</sup>nobility to have done. No part of all this, however, did any of them do ; or apparently attempt, or wish to do : so much is granted against them. But what then is the amount of their blame ? Simply that they were men of the world, and walked by the principles of such men ; <sup>20</sup>that they treated Burns, as other nobles and other commoners had done other poets ; as the English did Shakespeare ; as King Charles and his Cavaliers did Butler, as King Philip and his Grandees did Cervantes. Do men gather grapes of thorns ; or shall we cut down our thorns <sup>25</sup>for yielding only a fence and haws ? How, indeed, could the " nobility and gentry of his native land " hold out any help to this " Scottish Bard, proud of his name and country " ? Were the nobility and gentry so much as able rightly to

help themselves? Had they not their game to preserve ; their borough interests to strengthen ; dinners, therefore, of various kinds to eat and give? Were their means more than adequate to all this business, or less than adequate? 5 Less than adequate, in general ; few of them in reality were richer than Burns ; many of them were poorer ; for sometimes they had to wring their supplies, as with thumb-screws, from the hard hand ; and, in their need of guineas, to forget their duty of mercy ; which Burns was never reduced to do. Let us pity and forgive them. The game they preserved and shot, the dinners they ate and gave, the borough interests they strengthened, the *little* Babylons they severally builded by the glory of their might, are all melted or melting back into the primeval Chaos, as man's 10 merely selfish endeavours are fated to do : and here was an action, extending, in virtue of its worldly influence, we may say, through all time ; in virtue of its moral nature, beyond all time, being immortal as the Spirit of Goodness itself ; this action was offered them to do, and light was 15 not given them to do it. Let us pity and forgive them. But better than pity, let us go and *do otherwise*. Human suffering did not end with the life of Burns ; neither was the solemn mandate, "Love one another, bear one another's burdens," given to the rich only, but to all men. 20 True, we shall find no Burns to relieve, to assuage by our aid or our pity ; but celestial natures, groaning under the fardels of a weary life, we shall still find ; and that wretchedness which Fate has rendered *voiceless* and *tuneless* is 25 not the least wretched, but the most.

Still, we do not think that the blame of Burns's failure lies chiefly with the world. The world, it seems to us, treated him with more rather than with less kindness than it usually shows to such men. It has ever, we fear, shown but small favour to its Teachers: hunger and, 5 nakedness, perils and revilings, the prison, the cross, the poison-chalice have, in most times and countries, been the market-price it has offered for Wisdom, the welcome with which it has greeted those who have come to enlighten and purify it. Homer and Socrates, and the 10 Christian Apostles, belong to old days; but the world's Martyrology was not completed with these. Roger Bacon and Galileo languish in priestly dungeon; Tasso pines in the cell of a madhouse; Camoëns dies begging on the streets of Lisbon. So neglected, so "persecuted 15 they the Prophets," not in Judea only, but in all places where men have been. We reckon that every poet of Burns's order is, or should be, a prophet and teacher to his age; that he has no right to expect great kindness from it, but rather is bound to do it great kindness; that 20 Burns, in particular, experienced fully the usual proportion of the world's goodness; and that the blame of his failure, as we have said, lies not chiefly with the world.

Where, then, does it lie? We are forced to answer: With himself; it is his inward, not his outward, misfor- 25 tunes that bring him to the dust. Seldom, indeed, is it otherwise; seldom is a life morally wrecked but the grand cause lies in some internal mal-arrangement, some want less of good fortune than of good guidance. Nature

fashions no creature without implanting in it the strength needful for its action and duration ; least of all does she so neglect her masterpiece and darling, the poetic soul. Neither can we believe that it is in the power of *any* external circumstances utterly to ruin the mind of a man ; nay, if proper wisdom be given him, even so much as to affect its essential health and beauty. The sternest sum-total of all worldly misfortunes is Death ; nothing more *can* lie in the cup of human woe : yet many men, in all ages, have triumphed over Death, and led it captive ; converting its physical victory into a moral victory for themselves, into a seal and immortal consecration for all that their past life had achieved. What has been done, may be done again : nay, it is but the degree and not the kind of such heroism that differs in different seasons ; for without some portion of this spirit, not of boisterous daring, but of silent fearlessness, of Self-denial in all its forms, no good man, in any scene or time, has ever attained to be good.

We have already stated the error of Burns ; and mourned over it, rather than blamed it. It was the want of unity in his purposes, of consistency in his aims ; the hapless attempt to mingle in friendly union the common spirit of the world with the spirit of poetry, which is of a far different and altogether irreconcilable nature. Burns was nothing wholly, and Burns could be nothing, no man formed as he was can be anything, by halves. The heart, not of a mere hot-blooded, popular *Versemonger*, or poetical *Restaurateur*, but of a true Poet and Singer,

worthy of the old religious heroic times, had been given him : and he fell in an age, not of heroism and religion, but of skepticism, selfishness and triviality, when true Nobleness was little understood, and its place supplied by a hollow, dissocial, altogether barren and unfruitful principle of Pride. The influences of that age, his open, kind, susceptible nature, to say nothing of his highly untoward situation, made it more than usually difficult for him to cast aside, or rightly subordinate ; the better spirit that was within him ever sternly demanded its rights, its supremacy : he spent his life in endeavouring to reconcile these two ; and lost it, as he must lose it, without reconciling them.

Burns was born poor ; and born also to continue poor, for he would not endeavour to be otherwise : this it had been well could he have once for all admitted, and considered as finally settled. He was poor, truly ; but hundreds even of his own class and order of minds have been poorer, yet have suffered nothing deadly from it : nay, his own Father had a far sorcer battle with ungrateful destiny than his was ; and he did not yield to it, but died courageously warring, and to all moral intents prevailing, against it. True, Burns had little means, had even little time for poetry, his only real pursuit and vocation ; but so much the more precious was what little he had. In all these external respects his case was hard ; but very far from the hardest. Poverty, incessant drudgery and much worse evils, it has often been the lot of Poets and wise men to strive with, and their glory to conquer.

Locke was banished as a traitor ; and wrote his *Essay on the Human Understanding* sheltering himself in a Dutch garret. Was Milton rich or at his ease when he composed *Paradise Lost* ? Not only low, but fallen from a height ; 5 not only poor, but impoverished ; in darkness and with dangers compassed round, he sang his immortal song, and found fit audience, though few. Did not Cervantes finish his work, a maimed soldier and in prison ? Nay, was not the *Araucana*, which Spain acknowledges as its 10 Epic, written without even the aid of paper ; on scraps of leather, as the stout fighter and voyager snatched any moment from that wild warfare ?

And what, then, had these men, which Burns wanted ? Two things ; both which, it seems to us, are indispensable 15 for such men. They had a true, religious principle of morals ; and a single, not a double aim in their activity. They were not self-seekers and self-worshippers ; but seekers and worshippers of something far better than Self. Not personal enjoyment was their object ; but a high, 20 heroic idea of Religion, of Patriotism, of heavenly Wisdom, in one or the other form, ever hovered before them ; in which cause they neither shrank from suffering, or called on the earth to witness it as something wonderful ; but patiently endured, counting it blessedness enough 25 so to spend and be spent. Thus the “ golden-calf of Self-love,” however curiously carved, was not their Deity ; but the invisible Goodness, which alone is man’s reasonable service. This feeling was as a celestial fountain, whose streams refreshed into gladness and beauty all the prov-

inces of their otherwise too desolate existence. In a word, they willed one thing, to which all other things were subordinated and made subservient; and therefore they accomplished it. The wedge will rend rocks; but its edge must be sharp and single: if it be double, the wedge is bruised in pieces and will rend nothing.

Part of this superiority these men owed to their age; in which heroism and devotedness were still practised, or at least not yet disbelieved in: but much of it likewise <sup>10</sup> they owed to themselves. With Burns, again, it was different. His morality, in most of its practical points, is that of a mere worldly man; enjoyment, in a finer or coarser shape, is the only thing he longs and strives for. A noble instinct sometimes raises him above this; but an <sup>15</sup> instinct only, and acting only for moments. He has no Religion; in the shallow age, where his days were cast, Religion was not discriminated from the New and Old Light *forms* of Religion; and was, with these, becoming obsolete in the minds of men. His heart, indeed, is <sup>20</sup> alive with a trembling adoration, but there is no temple in his understanding. He lives in darkness and in the shadow of doubt. His religion, at best, is an anxious wish; like that of Rabelais, "a great *Perhaps*."

He loved Poetry warmly, and in his heart; could he <sup>25</sup> but have loved it purely, and with his whole undivided heart, it had been well. For Poetry, as Burns could have followed it, is but another form of Wisdom, of Religion; is itself Wisdom and Religion. But this also was

denied him. His poetry is a stray vagrant gleam, which will not be extinguished within him, yet rises not to be the true light of his path, but is often a wildfire that misleads him. It was not necessary for Burns to be rich, to be, or to seem, "independent"; but it *was* necessary for him to be at one with his own heart; to place what was highest in his nature highest also in his life; "to seek within himself for that consistency and sequence, which external events would forever refuse him." He was born to a poet; poetry was the celestial element of his being, and should have been the soul of his whole endeavours. Lifted into that serene ether, whither he had wings given him to mount, he would have needed no other elevation: poverty, neglect, and all evil, save the desecration of himself and his Art, were a small matter to him; the pride and the passions of the world lay far beneath his feet; and he looked down alike on noble and slave, on prince and beggar, and all that wore the stamp of man, with clear recognition, with brotherly affection, with sympathy, with pity. Nay, we question whether for his culture as a Poet poverty and much suffering for a season were not absolutely advantageous. Great men, in looking back over their lives, have testified to that effect. "I would not for much," says Jean Paul, "that I had been born richer." And yet Paul's birth was poor enough; for, in another place, he adds: "The prisoner's allowance is bread and water; and I had often only the latter." But the gold that is refined in the hottest furnace comes out the purest; or, as he has himself

expressed it, "the canary-bird sings sweeter the longer it has been trained in a darkened cage."

A man like Burns might have divided his hours between poetry and virtuous industry ; industry which all true feeling sanctions, nay, prescribes, and which has a 5 beauty, for that cause, beyond the pomp of thrones : but to divide his hours between poetry and rich men's banquets was an ill-starred and inauspicious attempt. How could he be at ease at such banquets? What had he to do there, mingling his music with the coarse roar of alto- 10 together earthly voices ; brightening the thick smoke of intoxication with fire lent him from heaven? Was it his aim to *enjoy* life? To-morrow he must go drudge as an Exciseman ! We wonder not that Burns became moody, indignant, and at times an offender against certain rules 15 of society ; but rather that he did not grow utterly frantic, and run *amuck* against them all. How could a man, so falsely placed, by his own or others' fault, ever know contentment or peaceable diligence for an hour? What he did, under such perverse guidance, and what he forbore 20 to do, alike fill us with astonishment at the natural strength and worth of his character.

Doubtless there was a remedy for this perverseness ; but not in others ; only in himself ; least of all in simple increase of wealth and worldly "respectability." We 25 hope we have now heard enough about the efficacy of wealth for poetry, and to make poets happy. Nay, have we not seen another instance of it in these very days? Byron, a man of an endowment considerably less ethereal

than that of Burns, is born in the rank not of a Scottish ploughman, but of an English peer: the highest worldly honours, the fairest worldly career, are his by inheritance; the richest harvest of fame he soon reaps, in another province, by his own hand. And what does all this avail him? Is he happy, is he good, is he true? Alas, he has a poet's soul, and strives towards the Infinite and the Eternal; and soon feels that all this is but mounting to the house-top to reach the stars! Like Burns, he is only a proud man; might, like him, have "purchased a pocket-copy of Milton to study the character of Satan;" for Satan also is Byron's grand exemplar, the hero of his poetry, and the model apparently of his conduct. As in Burns's case too, the celestial element will not mingle with the clay of earth; both poet and man of the world he must not be; vulgar Ambition will not live kindly with poetic Adoration; he *cannot* serve God and Mammon. Byron, like Burns, is not happy; nay, he is the most wretched of all men. His life is falsely arranged: the fire that is in him is not a strong, still, central fire, warming into beauty the products of a world; but it is the mad fire of a volcano; and now—we look sadly into the ashes of a crater, which ere long will fill itself with snow!

Byron and Burns were sent forth as missionaries to their generation, to teach it a higher Doctrine, a purer Truth; they had a message to deliver, which left them no rest till it was accomplished; in dim throes of pain, this divine behest lay smouldering within them; for they knew not what it meant, and felt it only in mysterious

anticipation, and they had to die without articulately uttering it. They are in the camp of the Unconverted ; yet not as high messengers of rigorous though benignant truth, but as soft flattering singers, and in pleasant fellowship will they live there : they are first adulated, then 5 persecuted ; they accomplish little for others ; they find no peace for themselves, but only death and the peace of the grave. We confess, it is not without a certain mournful awe that we view the fate of these noble souls, so richly gifted, yet ruined to so little purpose with all 10 their gifts. It seems to us there is a stern moral taught in this piece of history, — *twice* told us in our own time ! Surely to men of like genius, if there be any such, it carries with it a lesson of deep impressive significance. Surely it would become such a man, furnished for the 15 highest of all enterprises, that of being the Poet of his Age, to consider well what it is that he attempts, and in what spirit he attempts it. For the words of Milton are true in all times, and were never truer than in this : “ He who would write heroic poems must make his whole life a 20 heroic poem.” If he cannot first so make his life, then let him hasten from this arena ; for neither its lofty glories, nor its fearful perils, are fit for him. Let him dwindle into a modish balladmonger ; let him worship and be-sing the idols of the time, and the time will not 25 fail to reward him. If, indeed, he can endure to live in that capacity ! Byron and Burns could not live as idolpriests, but the fire of their own hearts consumed them ; and better it was for them that they could not. For it is

not in the favour of the great or of the small, but in a life of truth, and in the inexpugnable citadel of his own soul, that a Byron's or a Burns's strength must lie. Let the great stand aloof from him, or know how to reverence him. Beautiful is the union of wealth with favour and furtherance for literature ; like the costliest flower-jar enclosing the loveliest amaranth. Yet let not the relation be mistaken. A true poet is not one whom they can hire by money or flattery to be a minister of their pleasures, their writer of occasional verses, their purveyor of table-wit ; he cannot be their menial, he cannot even be their partisan. At the peril of both parties, let no such union be attempted ! Will a Courser of the Sun work softly in the harness of a Dray-horse ? His hoofs are of fire, and his path is through the heavens, bringing light to all lands ; will he lumber on mud highways, dragging ale for earthly appetites from door to door ?

But we must stop short in these considerations, which would lead us to boundless lengths. We had something to say on the public moral character of Burns ; but this also we must forbear. We are far from regarding him as guilty before the world, as guiltier than the average ; nay, from doubting that he is less guilty than one of ten thousand. Tried at a tribunal far more rigid than that where the *Plebiscita* of common civic reputations are pronounced, he has seemed to us even there less worthy of blame than of pity and wonder. But the world is habitually unjust in its judgments of such men ; unjust on many grounds, of which this one may be stated as the substance : It

decides, like a court of law, by dead statutes ; and not positively but negatively, less on what is done right, than on what is or is not done wrong. Not the few inches of deflection from the mathematical orbit, which are so easily measured, but the *ratio* of these to the whole <sup>5</sup> diameter, constitutes the real aberration. This orbit may be a planet's, its diameter the breadth of the solar system ; or it may be a city hippodrome ; nay, the circle of a ginhorse, its diameter a score of feet or paces. But the inches of deflection only are measured : and it is assumed <sup>10</sup> that the diameter of the ginhorse, and that of the planet, will yield the same ratio when compared with them ! Here lies the root of many a blind, cruel condemnation of Burnses, Swifts, Rousseaus, which one never listens to with approval. Granted, the ship comes into harbour <sup>15</sup> with shrouds and tackle damaged ; the pilot is blame-worthy ; he has not been all-wise and all-powerful : but to know *how* blameworthy, tell us first whether his voyage has been round the Globe, or only to Ramsgate and the Isle of Dogs. ✓ <sup>20</sup>

With our readers in general, with men of right feeling anywhere, we are not required to plead for Burns. In pitying admiration he lies enshrined in all our hearts, in a far nobler mausoleum than that one of marble ; neither will his Works, even as they are, pass away from the <sup>25</sup> memory of men. While the Shakspeares and Miltons roll on like mighty rivers through the country of Thought, bearing fleets of traffickers and assiduous pearl-fishers on their waves ; this little Valclusa Fountain will also arrest ✓

our eye : for this also is of Nature's own and most cunning workmanship, bursts from the depths of the earth, with a full gushing current, into the light of day ; and often will the traveller turn aside to drink of its clear waters, and muse among its rocks and pines !

23  
8

## NOTES

The heavy marginal figures stand for page, and the lighter ones for line.

55 : 1. **It is no uncommon thing**, etc. When Carlyle wrote this essay he was thirty-three years old, and had won but little recognition, nor did he until nine years later. The most striking recent illustration of the tardy recognition of men of genius is the case of Browning, who for fifty years was ridiculed by the great majority of readers.

55 : 2. **Butler.** Samuel Butler (1612-1680) after the Restoration wrote a brilliant satire on the Puritans that greatly amused the court of Charles II. He was promised patronage by the king, but seventeen years later died in poverty. *Hudibras* was one of Carlyle's favorite books while at the University of Edinburgh.

55 : 6. **The inventor of a spinning-jenny.** Carlyle refers to James Hargreaves, who, however, did not reap his reward in his own day, for he was driven from his home in Lancashire by a mob of laborers who did not wish his machine to supplant their work.

55 : 14. **Brave mausoleum.** The citizens of Dumfries began in 1813 the collection of funds that led in 1815 to the erection of this mausoleum in which Burns and his family are buried. *Brave*, used in the old sense of *fine, splendid*, is evidently ironical, for the mausoleum, with its tin dome and somewhat showy statuary, has excited the ridicule of critics and visitors. In the Introduction to the *New Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle*, Carlyle is reported to have said to the Duke of Rutland, who told him that he had just returned from Dumfries, and was sorry to notice that the stones in the Burns mausoleum were crumbling away from exposure to the

weather: "Sorry!" exclaimed Carlyle, "I am very glad to hear it. I hope they will go on crumbling till there is no one stone left upon another. To think of it, that a man whose name was Turner, and who called himself Turnerelli, should have been employed to make a monument to the greatest genius that ever lived!"

55 : 19. **The sixth narrative.** Carlyle probably refers to Lives by Heron (1797), Currie (1800), Irving (1804), Walker (1811), and Peterkin (1815). There had been critical articles and poems by Jeffrey, Wilson, Wordsworth, Mackenzie, etc.

56 : 1. **Lockhart.** John Gibson Lockhart (1794-1854) is better known as the son-in-law and biographer of Sir Walter Scott. His life of Burns, though still readable, lacks the genius that has made his biography of Scott second only to *Boswell's Johnson*. His life, written by Andrew Lang, reveals the fact that the relations between him and Carlyle were more intimate than had been generally supposed.

56 : 17. **Sir Thomas Lucy.** The tradition is that Shakespeare, along with some gay companions, was prosecuted for stealing deer on Sir Thomas's estate, and that the former, after writing a satirical ballad and posting it on the latter's gate, fled to London and became an actor. A similar tradition connects him with John a Combe, a wealthy neighbor of Stratford, for whom he wrote a doggerel epitaph.

56 : 26. **Excise Commissioners.** His associates in the excise business — some of them his superiors with whom he got in trouble on account of his sympathy with the French Revolution.

56 : 27. **Gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt.** See Introduction, page 49.

56 : 29. **Ayr Writers.** The lawyers, solicitors, and possibly the chief clerks, of the town of Ayr, notably Robert Aiken, to whom Burns dedicated the *Cotter's Saturday Night*.

56 : 29. **The New and Old Light Clergy.** The radicals and the conservatives in the religious life of that day. See Introduction, page 46.

57 : 9. **His former Biographers, etc.** Carlyle says elsewhere,

"A well written life is almost as rare as a well spent one." While the criticism with regard to Dr. Currie's Life must stand, it is to be remembered that from the edition of Burns's poems which he supervised £800 went to Mrs. Burns and her family and none to himself. He was a Scotch physician (1756-1805). That which Carlyle complains of as lacking in former biographers—a delineation of the resulting character as a living unity—is his own strong point in this essay and others of his works. Emerson speaks of his "devouring eyes and portrait-painting hands."

58 : 17. **Constable's Miscellany.** Constable was the original publisher of the *Edinburgh Review* in which this essay appeared. In his prosperity he projected a *Miscellany of Original and Selected Publications in Literature, Science, and the Arts*,—a great scheme for popularizing literature. Lockhart's *Life of Burns* appeared in this series after Constable's death in 1827. Constable was the personal friend of Sir Walter Scott, and the publisher of his novels.

58 : 27. **Mr. Morris Birkbeck.** An English tourist who wrote *Notes on a Journey to America from the Coast of Virginia to the Territory of Illinois*, London, 1818.

59 : 11. **Our notions upon this subject, etc.** See Introduction for Carlyle's conception of criticism. Contrast the questions here asked by Carlyle with the judicial tone of criticism adopted by Jeffrey in his famous saying about Wordsworth, "This won't do."

60 : 26. **Had his very materials to discover . . . without instruction, without model.** Carlyle here, as throughout the essay, underrates the influence of the early Scotch singers on Burns. He always magnified the individual at the expense of "movements" and "tendencies" and "environment." Is he right? See Introduction for the influence of the book of Songs, and of Ramsay and Fergusson in awakening Burns to a life of poetry. It is not detracting from the genius of Burns to say, with Andrew Lang, that he was "not an innovator, but a continuator." Recent critics, notably Mr. Henley, have pointed out in detail his obliga-

tions to the verse and sentiment of his predecessors. "He passed the folk song of his nation through the mint of his mind, and he reproduced it, stamped with his image and lettered with his superscription: so that for the world at large it exists and will go on existing, not as he found but as he left it. Burns's knowledge of the old minstrelsy was unique; he was saturate with its tradition, as he was absolute master of its emotions and effects; no such artist in folk-song as he (so in other words Sir Walter said) has ever worked in literature. But a hundred forgotten singers went to the making of his achievement and himself." And again: "He was the last of a school . . . [he was] more largely dependent upon his exemplars than any other great poet has ever been."

**61 : 18. An age the most prosaic.** Carlyle severely criticised the eighteenth century; in passage after passage he has expressed his abhorrence of its atheism, its materialism, its intellectualism, its lack of vision. Cf. Matthew Arnold: "Gray, a born poet, fell upon an age of prose. . . . Gray, with the qualities of mind and soul of a genuine poet, was isolated in his century."

**61 : 24. Ferguson or Ramsay.** Robert Fergusson (1750-1774), the author of *The Farmer's Ingle*, which was the "model" of *Cotter's Saturday Night*. When Burns first went to Edinburgh he looked up the grave of Fergusson in the Cannongate churchyard, and finding no memorial stone, asked permission to erect one. Robert Louis Stevenson, commenting on this incident says, "Burns knew best whence he drew fire—from the poor, white-faced, drunken, vicious boy that raved himself to death in the Edinburgh madhouse." "And the old Robin, who was before Burns and the flood, died in his acute, painful youth and left the models of the great things that were to come." Burns also visited the shop of Allan Ramsay (1686-1758), author of the *Gentle Shepherd*—a pastoral poem—and the *Tea-Table Miscellany*—a collection of Scotch poems that had considerable influence over both Burns and Scott. These two poets kept alive a genuine appreciation of nature and of rural

life, while English literature was altogether under the dominance of classical ideals.

62 : 22. **Criticism . . . a cold business.** In an essay on the state of German literature Carlyle says that a critic is an interpreter between the inspired and the uninspired. He believed that the business of the critic was to make readers and not to drive them away from an author. Sympathy was an element in criticism quite as important as insight.

63 : 3. **Sir Hudson Lowe.** Governor of St. Helena during the captivity of Napoleon on that island (1815-1821).

64 : 10. **The "Daisy."** See the poem *To a Mountain Daisy*.

64 : 11. **Wee, cowering, etc.** See the poem *To a Mouse*.

64 : 15. **He dwells with a sad and oft-returning fondness, etc.** Compare for the inspiration of this passage the words from Burns's *Commonplace Book*, April, 1784: "There is scarcely any earthly object gives me more—I don't know if I should call it pleasure, but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me—than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood or high plantation, in a cloudy, winter day, and hear a stormy wind howling among the trees and raving o'er the plain. It is my best season for devotion; my mind is rapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to Him who, in the pompous language of Scripture, 'Walks on the wings of the wind.'" It was under such circumstances, Burns tells us, that he composed the dirge *Winter*. The italicized words of the passage are from *Psalm civ*.

64 : 21. **Observe him chiefly, etc.** They are not so often read, but the student will best appreciate Burns's genial comradeship by reading his epistles to Sillar, Lapraik, Simpson, Gavin Hamilton, etc.

65 : 21. **The majesty of Poetry and Manhood.** Cf. what Carlyle says of the "Rock of Independence," page 100.

66 : 6. **A soul like an Aeolian harp.** A favorite figure not only with Burns and Carlyle but with other English poets, notably Shelley and Coleridge.

**66 : 9. No fitter business.** Carlyle seems to blame the world here more than in the latter part of the essay. In *Past and Present* he says: "We English find a Poet, as brave a man as has been made for a 100 years or so anywhere under the sun ; and do we kindle bonfires, or thank the gods? Not at all. We, taking due counsel of it, set the man to gauge ale-barrels in the Burgh of Dumfries, and pique ourselves on our 'patronage of genius.'"

**66 : 19. His poems are . . . mere occasional effusions.** At Mossgiel, while Burns was writing his most famous poems, he was working hard as a day laborer. He wrote his poems generally as a result of some sudden feeling. His wife has left a description of his writing *Tam O'Shanter*. While walking by the river side with her two children, she noted that Burns was *crooning to himself*. Directly she noticed strange and wild gesticulations of the bard as he was reciting very loud, and "with tears rolling down his cheeks, some of the rhymes of the poem." This is the best possible way in which genuine lyrical poetry can be written, not with the strain and stress of one who, like Carlyle, writes extended histories or, like Milton, writes a sustained epic.

**67 : 13. Over all regions.** "They appeal to all ranks, they search all ages, they cheer toilworn men under every clime. Wherever the English tongue is heard, beneath the suns of India, amid African deserts, on the western prairies of America, among the squatters of Australia, whenever men of British blood would give vent to their deepest, kindliest, most genial feelings, it is to the songs of Burns they spontaneously turn, and find in them at once a perfect utterance and a fresh tie of brotherhood."

— JOHN CAMPBELL SHAIRP.

**67 : 20. His Sincerity.** That which gives unity to *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, and which lies at the basis of every study Carlyle ever made, is this element of sincerity. He talked about it so much that it became almost a bit of cant.

**68 : 3. His heart is too full to be silent.** Compare *In Memoriam* :—

"I do but sing because I must,  
And pipe but as the linnets sing."

**68 : 9. Si vis me fieri, dolendum est primum ipse tibi.** "If thou wouldest have me weep, thou must first feel grief thyself."

**69 : 12. Byron.** Byron had died four years before this essay was written; in Carlyle's mind he best represented the mood of contemporary thought in England—a mood of sentimentalism and discontent. His advice in *Sartor Resartus* was, "Close thy *Byron*. Open thy *Goethe*." In the same book he has much to say of the *Sorrows of Lord George*. He undoubtedly puts his finger upon the weak point in Byron's character; for as an acute French critic has said, "he posed all his life long." Byron's objection to a certain portrait was that it did not make him look sad enough. Matthew Arnold was right, however, in calling attention to a fact, equally as significant in Byron's character—his undoubted strength. "When he had fairly warmed to his work, then he became another man; then the theatrical personage passed away; then a higher power took possession of him and filled him." The poems to which Carlyle refers are *Childe Harold* (the third and fourth cantos of which contain some of the most eloquent passages in English poetry), the *Giaour* (one of his sensational Eastern tales), and *Don Juan* (a satire on the human race).

**70 : 28. Certain of his letters.** The principal letters referred to are those written to Dr. Moore, Mr. Murdoch, Mrs. M'Lehose (Clarinda), G. Thomson, Dr. Blair, and others. The probable explanation of the style in which Burns wrote his letters is the influence of eighteenth-century letter writers, a collection of whose letters he read while a young man.

**71 : 27. Mrs. Dunlop.** A very estimable woman of high rank who, on reading the first edition of Burns's poems, was so attracted, especially by his *Cotter's Saturday Night*, that she immediately sent a messenger fifteen miles away to congratulate the poet and to bring back other copies of the poems. She wrote encouragingly to Burns

and was his steadfast friend until his death. To her he wrote one of his last letters: "An illness which has long hung about me, in all probability will speedily send me beyond that *bourn whence no traveler returns*. Your friendship, with which for many years you honored me, was a friendship dearest to my soul. Your conversation, and especially your correspondence, were at once highly entertaining and instructive. With what pleasure did I use to break up the seal! The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart."

72 : 3. **His choice of subjects.** Wordsworth, to whom the words of this paragraph might well apply, recognized Burns as his master: —

"He showed my youth  
How verse may build a princely throne  
On humble truth."

72 : 13-19. **Rose-coloured Novels . . . swarm in our poetry.** In this passage Carlyle refers especially to Scott, Southey, Moore, and Cooper, who at that time were all in the ascendancy. He had but little use for what he called the "innumerable progeny of chivalry plays, feudal delineations, political antiquarian performances." Speaking of Goethe, he says: "Neither does he bring his heroes from remote oriental climates or periods of chivalry or any section, either of Atlantis or the Age of Gold." The revival of interest in the Middle Ages had but little interest for Carlyle, although, strangely enough, he himself, in *Past and Present*, brought to life one of the strangest bits of mediæval life. He was not just to literature that merely amused people and that was not full of moral ideas. His essay on Scott affords a striking contrast to the essay on Burns.

73 : 14. **The Ideal world is not remote from the Actual.** We have here a touch of idealism which is so characteristic of *Sartor Resartus*, a chapter in which on Natural Supernaturalism is perhaps the best expression in English prose of idealism or transcendentalism.

74 : 11. **Minerva Press.** A printing house in London which was noted in the eighteenth century for the publication of trashy, sentimental novels.

74 : 12. **A poet of Nature's own making.** In the *Epistle to John Lapraik*, Burns says: —

" Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire,  
That's a' the learning I desire ;  
Then, tho' I drudge thro' dub an' mire  
At pleugh or cart,  
My Muse, though hamely in attire,  
May touch the heart."

74 : 18. **"The elder dramatists."** Charles Lamb had a few years before this time aroused considerable interest in Shakespeare's contemporaries. His letter to Wordsworth, urging him to read these poets, Carlyle might well have had in mind.

75 : 6. **Borgia.** Probably Cæsar Borgia, one of the most eminent and most wicked of a very prominent Italian family from which came cardinals and popes.

75 : 10. **Mossiel and Tarbolton.** See Introduction. Burns says, "I felt as much pleasure in being in the secret of half the loves of the parish of Tarbolton as ever did statesman in knowing the intrigues of the courts of Rome."

75 : 11. **Crockford's.** A famous gaming club-house in London, built in 1827.

75 : 11. **Tuileries.** A royal residence in Paris adjoining the Louvre; it was burned in 1871.

75 : 13. **It is hinted, etc.** In 1825 Macaulay had written his essay on Milton for the *Edinburgh Review* — an essay that brought him immediate fame. His one main contention in it is that Milton was born too late to be a great poet, that "as civilization advances poetry almost necessarily declines." Carlyle, no doubt, took much delight in demolishing this thesis. He once referred to Macaulay's "Niagara of commonplace talk."

75 : 20. **Is not every genius an impossibility till he appear?** "Show our critics a great man, Luther, for example, they begin to what they call 'account' for him; not to worship him, but to take the dimensions of him,— and bring him out to be a little kind of man. He was the creature of the time, they say; the time called him forth, the time did everything, he nothing—but what we the little critics could have done, too! The time called forth? Alas, we have known time to call loudly enough for their great man, but not find him when they called! He was not there; Providence had not sent him; the time calling its loudest had to go down in confusion and wreck because he would not come when called."— *Heroes and Hero-Worship*.

75 : 24. **It is not the dark place, etc.** Cf. Browning's *Fra Lippo Lippi* :—

"For, don't you mark? We're made so that we love  
 First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
 Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;  
 And so they are better, painted—better to us,  
 Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;  
 God uses us to help each other so,  
 Lending our minds out."

75 : 29. **The Wounded Hare.** See poem *To a Mouse*.

76 : 3. **Hallowe'en.** See poem by that name.

76 : 4. **Theocritus.** A Greek pastoral poet of the third century B.C. who lived in Sicily, and brought to Greek poetry a fresh feeling for rural life.

76 : 6. **Council of Trent.** A council held at Trent (1545-1563), which condemned the leading doctrines of the Reformation.

76 : 7. **Roman Jubilee.** A solemn festival of the Catholic Church, usually held once in twenty-five or fifty years. At such times men may purchase pardon by acts of penance.

76 : 7. **Superstition . . . Fun.** Characters in *The Holy Fair*.

77 : 1. **And observe with what a fierce prompt force.** The words of this paragraph are truer even of Carlyle than of Burns.

Cf. what Ruskin says of the penetrative power of the imagination. "It never stops at crusts or ashes, or outward images of any kind; it ploughs them all aside, and plunges into the very central fiery heart."

77 : 18. **Retzsch** (Moritz, 1779-1857). A German etcher and painter, who illustrated the works of Goethe, Schiller, and Shakespeare, and was therefore interesting to Carlyle.

78 : 18. **Auld Brig.** A reference to the *Brigs of Ayr*, in which, however, it is the fall of the new bridge rather than of the old that is prophesied.

79 : 6. **Poussin-picture.** Nicholas Poussin, a French painter (1594-1665), who painted the *Deluge*, to which Carlyle may refer.

79 : 12. **Smithy of the Cyclops.** See *Odyssey*, Book ix.

79 : 12. **Yoking of Priam's Chariot.** See *Iliad*, Book xxiv. (Pope's translation may be accessible to the student.)

79 : 13. **Burn-the-wind.** The blacksmith in the poem *Scotch Drink* is called *Burnewin*.

79 : 20. **The pale moon**, etc. This passage is inaccurately quoted, and should read (Cambridge edition of the poems):—

" The wan moon sets behind the white wave,  
And Time is setting with me, O!  
False friends, false love, farewell! for mair  
I'll ne'er trouble them nor thee, O!"

80 : 5. **Richardson.** Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), author of the first English novel, *Pamela* (1740), and later of *Clarissa Harlowe*.

80 : 5. **Defoe.** Daniel Defoe (1661-1731), author of *Robinson Crusoe*.

80 : 20. "A gentleman that derived his patent," etc. Captain Matthew Henderson is referred to in the sub-title of an elegy on him as "a gentleman who held the patent for his honors immediately from Almighty God."

80 : 23. "Red-wat-shod." Red-wet-shod, wading in blood. See *Epistle to William Simpson* : —

"At Wallace' name, what Scottish blood  
But boils up in a springtide flood ?  
Oft have our fearless fathers strode  
    By Wallace' side,  
Still pressing onward, red-wat-shod,  
    Or glorious dy'd !

81 : 2. **Professor Stewart.** Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), professor of Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh. He generally spent his summers at Cartrine on the Ayr, not far from Burns's farm. See Introduction for his connection with Burns's life in Edinburgh.

81 : 13. **Keats.** In the original version of this essay, as it appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, Jeffrey changed "weak-eyed maudlin" into "extreme," and "random" into "pervading," but Carlyle, in editing his essays, changed it to its present form. He is thoroughly unfair to one of the greatest English poets, largely because he had little sympathy with the aesthetic ideals of one who wrote, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." Tennyson was far nearer right when he said that in Keats's early death English poetry suffered an irreparable loss.

81 : 17. **The result of their general harmony and completion.** Cf. Matthew Arnold's definition of culture as the harmonious expansion of all our powers, and Edward Dowden's characterization of Wordsworth: "All diverse energies blended in Wordsworth's nature into a harmonious whole. The senses were informed by the soul and became spiritual; passion was conjoined with reason and with conscience; knowledge was vivified by emotion; a calm passivity was united with a creative energy; peace and excitation were harmonized; and over all brooded the imagination."

81 : 20. **The Hell of Dante.** Dante's *Divina Commedia* is divided into three parts, *Inferno* (Hell), *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*.

81 : 27. **Novum Organum.** Bacon's greatest work in philosophy, in which he outlines the inductive philosophy which was to play such an important part in the scientific work of the seventeenth century.

82 : 13. **The logic of the senate and the forum.** Carlyle is constantly making light of the logical faculty as compared with intuition or insight. He calls it "Attorney logic" in *Sartor Resartus*. "Foolish Word-monger and Motive-grinder, who in thy Logic-mill hast an earthly mechanism for the godlike itself and would fain grind me out virtue from the husk of Pleasure,—I tell thee nay."

84 : 22 I thought me, etc. See the poem *A Winter Night*.

85 : 19. **Dr. Slop . . . uncle Toby.** Characters in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, a book much liked by both Burns and Carlyle.

85 : 23. **But has it not been said, etc.** The two following paragraphs were not in the essay as printed in the *Edinburgh Review*.

85 : 24. "Indignation makes verses" (*Facit indignatio versus*), Juvenal. Cf. Tennyson's *Poet* :—

"Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,  
The love of love."

86 : 6. **A good hater.** Dr. Johnson is reported to have said: "Dear Bathurst was a man to my very heart's content: he hated a fool and he hated a rogue, and he hated a Whig: he was a very good hater."

86 : 19. **Dweller in yon Dungeon dark.** A poem written under circumstances thus related by Burns: "In January last, on my road to Ayrshire, I had to put up at Bailie Whigham's, in Sanquhar, the only tolerable inn in the place. The frost was keen, and the grim evening and howling wind were ushering in a night of snow and drift. My horse and I were both much fatigued with the labors of the day, and just as my friend the Bailie and I were bidding defiance to the storm, over a smoking bowl, in wheels the funeral pageantry

of the late great Mrs. Oswald; and poor I am forced to brave all the horrors of a tempestuous night and jade my horse, my young horse, whom I had just christened Pegasus, twelve miles further on through the wildest moors and hills of Ayrshire to New Cumnock, to the next inn! The powers of poesy and prose sink under me when I would describe what I felt. Suffice it to say, that when a good fire at New Cumnock had so far recovered my frozen sinews, I sat down and wrote the enclosed ode."

86 : 21. *Furies of Aeschylus*. In the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus the Furies are introduced in the chorus. Aeschylus was one of the greatest of Greek tragedians.

87 : 1. *Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled*. There is a contradiction as to the circumstances under which the poem was written. Carlyle accepts the statement of Syme, who says that after visiting Mr. Gordon at Kenmure, he and the poet passed over the moors to Gatehouse in a wild storm: "The sky was sympathetic with the wretchedness of the soil. It became lowering and dark, the winds sighed hollow, the lightning gleamed, the thunders rolled. The poet enjoyed the awful scene. He spoke not a word, but seemed rapt in meditation. In a little while the rain began to fall. It poured in floods upon us, and what do you think Burns was about? He was charging the English army along with Bruce at Bannockburn." Two days later, when they were returning from St. Mary's Isle to Dumfries, "he was engaged in the same manner, and produced me the address of Bruce to his troops." Burns himself, in a letter to Thomson (August or September, 1793), gives a different account of the origin of the poem: "This thought [Bruce's victory at Bannockburn], in my yesternight's evening walk, roused me to a pitch of enthusiasm on the theme of liberty and independence, which I threw into a kind of Scot's ode, fitted to the air, that one might suppose to be the gallant, royal Scot's address to his heroic followers on that eventful morning." It is difficult to reconcile these two statements, although one would prefer to believe the first, especially as some of the finest lines in *Marmion* were said to

be composed in the same way. It is evident from the conclusion of Burns's letter that the thought of the French Revolution was also in his mind, and that in this poem, as in *A Man's a Man for a' That*, he was chanting the battle-song of modern democracy.

87 : 19. **Cacus.** A giant in Virgil's *Aeneid*, slain by Hercules for stealing cattle.

88 : 3. **At Thebes, and in Pelops' line.** Milton, in summarizing the tragedies of Greek literature, says in *Il Penseroso* :—

"Sometime let gorgeous Tragedy  
In sceptred pall come sweeping by,  
Presenting Thebes, or Pelops' line,  
Or the tale of Troy divine."

88 : 17. **Humour.** "And if with an eye for words and effects in words, that student have also the faculty of laughter, then are his admiration and his pleasure multiplied tenfold. For the master-quality of Burns, the quality which has gone, and will ever go, the furtherest to make him universally and perennially acceptable—acceptable in Melbourne (say) a hundred years hence as in Mauchline syne—is humour. . . . But his humour—broad, rich, prevailing, now lascivious or gargantuan and now fanciful or jocose, now satirical and brutal and now instinct with sympathy,—is ever irresistible."—HENLEY.

89 : 1. **Sterne.** Laurence Sterne (1713-1768), an English novelist, author of *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*. Cf. 85 : 19.

89 : 26. **Tieck . . . Musäus.** For the sake of those who are not German readers, it may be said that Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853) and Johann Karl August Musäus (1735-1787) worked with materials drawn from popular legend, but that Musäus treated his material in a satirical vein rather than in the spirit of the original. Carlyle had translated from both of these authors.

90 : 21. **The Jolly Beggars.** Henley, commenting on Lockhart's preference for the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, says: "I, for my

part, would not give my *Holy Fair*, still less my *Hallowe'en* or my *Jolly Beggars*—observed, selected, excellently reported—for a wilderness of *Saturday Nights*." He quotes, with evident disgust, a letter from a friend stating that the old Poosie-Nansie Tavern has a large room, on the walls of which is hung in the place of honor—printed and framed and glazed—not the *Jolly Beggars*, as one might suppose, but the *Cotter's Saturday Night*.

91 : 20. **Teniers.** David Teniers (1582-1649) a Flemish artist who painted mostly peasants with landscapes.

91 : 25. **The Beggars' Opera.** A play written by John Gay (1685-1732) at the suggestion of Swift. It ran for a hundred nights. The *Beggars' Bush* was written by John Fletcher (1579-1625).

92 : 14. **The Songs of Burns.** He wrote in all nearly three hundred for Johnson's *Museum* and Thomson's *Scottish Airs*. As has been seen in the sketch of Burns's life, most of these songs were written at Ellisland and Dumfries, while many of them are simply adaptations of older songs, and nearly all of them are words written for tunes already in existence. There are at least a dozen that rank with the great lyrics of the world's literature. It is interesting to compare with the verdict of Carlyle that of Tennyson and others, as given in a bit of reminiscence by Aubrey de Vere: "Tennyson exclaimed to me one day, 'Read the exquisite songs of Burns. In shape, each of them has the perfection of the berry; in light the radiance of the dewdrop; you forget for its sake those stupid things, his serious pieces.' The same day I met Wordsworth, and named Burns to him. Wordsworth praised him, even more vehemently than Tennyson had done, as the great genius who brought Poetry back to nature; but ended, 'Of course I refer to his serious efforts, such as the *Cotter's Saturday Night*; those foolish little amatory songs of his one has to forget.' I told the tale to Henry Taylor that evening, and his answer was: 'Burns' exquisite songs and Burns' serious efforts are to me alike tedious, and disagreeable reading.'"

**92 : 15. Since the era of Queen Elizabeth, etc.** Carlyle either did not know about, or did not care at all for, the lyrics of the seventeenth century, such as those of Herrick, Vaughan, Herbert, Crashaw, and Carew, which from the standpoint of pure melody and beauty must always have a high rank in English lyric poetry.

**92 : 21. Ossorius the Portugal Bishop.** Noyes quotes the words of Bacon in his *Advancement of Learning* concerning this "Cicerio of Portugal." They express so well the exact opposite of all Carlyle's views of art that they should be quoted: "Men began to hunt more after words than matter; more after the choiceness of the phrase, and the round and clean composition of the sentence, and the sweet falling of the clauses, and the varying and illustration of their works with tropes and figures, than after the weight of matter, worth of subject, soundness of argument, life of invention, or depth of judgment. Then grew the flowing and watery vein of Ossorius the Portugal bishop, to be in price."

**93 : 7. They actually and in themselves are music.** Allan Cunningham has given an account of the circumstances under which Burns's songs were composed, showing that the musical element was the most notable feature: "When he lived in Dumfries he had three favourite walks—on the dock-green by the river-side; among the ruins of Lincluden College; and towards the Martindon-Ford, on the north side of the Nith. This latter place was secluded, commanded a view of the distant hills and the romantic towers of Lincluden, and afforded soft greensward banks to rest upon, and the sight and sound of the stream. As soon as he was heard to hum to himself, his wife saw that he had something in his mind, and was quite prepared to see him snatch up his hat, and set silently off for his musing-ground. When by himself, and in the open air, his ideas arranged themselves in their natural order—words came at will, and he seldom returned without having finished a song. . . . When the verses were finished, he passed them through the ordeal of Mrs. Burns's voice; listened attentively when she sang; asked her if any of the words were difficult, — and when

one happened to be too rough, he readily found a smoother; but he never, save at the resolute entreaty of a scientific musician, sacrificed sense to sound. The autumn was his favourite season, and the twilight his favourite hour of study."

94 : 12. **Our Fletcher.** A Scotch political writer, Andrew Fletcher (1655-1716), who, in his account of a conversation concerning a *Right Regulation of Government for the Common good of Mankind*, says: "I knew a very wise man" who "believed if a man were permitted to make all the ballads he need not care who should make the laws of a nation."

95 : 10-16. **Grays and Glovers.** Is it not strange that Glover (1712-1785), an obscure poet, the author of a forgotten epic, *Leonidas*, should be coupled with Gray (1716-1771), one of the most popular of English poets? No one who has ever read the *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard* can fail to see the strong local color in this poem. Goldsmith is excepted from the general statement on account of his *Deserted Village* and the *Vicar of Wakefield*, which are full of the charm of rural life. While writing in the form of the eighteenth century, he had something of the spirit of the nineteenth. Carlyle is right in his characterization of the *Rambler*, one of the many successors of the *Spectator*, and of *Rasselas*, a romance of the East, although Johnson himself is one of the best types of the English race, with all its prejudice and its commonsense way of doing things.

95 : 21. **At Geneva.** Just as Swiss soldiers have fought as mercenaries in the armies of all the nations of Europe, so leading citizens of France, Germany, and Italy have made their homes in the Swiss capital. There is still little national feeling.

95 : 22. **For a long period, etc.** The union between Scotland and England was perfected in 1709, and undoubtedly had much to do with the suppression of patriotism in Scotland. It is hardly just to say that there was no literature, for in Scotland something of the genuine folk-song remained, while England was in the grip of classic ideals. See page 140 for references to Fergusson and Ramsay.

95 : 24. **Addison and Steele.** Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729) were intimate friends from their boyhood. They had much to do with the development of periodical literature. The *Tatler* was established in 1709 and the *Spectator* in 1711. See Thackeray's *English Humorists*.

95 : 25. **John Boston.** Thomas Boston (1677-1732), the name of whose book is *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, a work setting forth the theology of Calvinism.

95 : 27. **Schisms in our National Church.** Such struggles as those of the Covenanters and that of the Old Lights and the New Lights.

95 : 28. **The fiercer schisms in our Body Politic.** The long struggle between the adherents of the Stuarts (called Jacobites) and the government of William III, Anne, and the Georges. Even Sir Walter Scott was at heart something of an adherent of the Stuarts.

95 : 3. **Lord Kames.** Henry Home Kames (1696-1782), author of the *Elements of Criticism*, and also a distinguished judge.

95 : 4. **Hume.** David Hume (1711-1776), a very acute philosopher and author of a well-known history of England.

95 : 4. **Robertson.** William Robertson (1721-1793), author of *History of Charles V* and a *History of Scotland*.

95 : 4. **Smith.** Adam Smith (1723-1790), author of the *Wealth of Nations*, the first scientific treatment of economic science.

95 : 14. **Racine.** Jean Racine (1639-1699), a famous French dramatist.

95 : 14. **Voltaire.** François Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694-1778), one of the greatest of French writers, a poet, dramatist, and historian. He is especially known as the enemy of Christianity.

95 : 14. **Batteux.** Charles Batteux (1713-1780), a French man of letters, chiefly noted as a writer on æsthetics.

95 : 14. **Boileau.** Nicholas Boileau-Despreaux (1636-1711), the most famous of French critics of the classical period. He had much influence over Pope.

96 : 16. **Montesquieu.** Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755), a French jurist and political philosopher, author of *L'Esprit des Lois*.

96 : 16. **Mably.** Gabriel Bonnot, Abbé de Mably (1709-1785), a French publicist.

96 : 17. **Quesnay.** François Quesnay (1694-1774), a French political economist and physician.

96 : 22. **La Flèche.** A town on the Loire River in France, at which Hume spent several years.

97 : 16. "Doctrines of Rent." The subject of one of the chapters in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, a book that Carlyle had a contempt for, because it had brought into the thought of England the idea of "the economic man," against which he struggled earnestly in his *Past and Present*. *The Natural History of Religion* is a work in which Hume endeavors to treat religion from a thoroughly natural standpoint, which of course is directly contrary to the natural supernaturalism of Carlyle.

98 : 15. **He eagerly searches after some lonely brother, etc.** Burns, in his epistles to John Lapraik and David Sillar, shows an eagerness to find companions in verse that is altogether out of proportion to the poetical achievements of these men. The fact that Burns erected a memorial stone over Fergusson's grave has already been referred to.

98 : 20. **A wish, etc.** Quoted from *Answer to Verses Addressed to the Poet by the Guidwife of Wauchope House*, written in 1787. Cf. the conclusion of the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, stanzas 19-21; *Epistle to William Simpson*.

"But, Willie, set your fit to mine,  
An' cock your crest!  
We'll gar our streams and burnies shine  
Up wi' the best.

"We'll sing auld Coila's plains an' fells,  
Her moors red-brown wi' heather bells,  
Her banks and braes, her dens an' dells,

Where glorious Wallace  
Aft bure the gree, as story tells,  
Frae Suthron billies."

102 : 22. **The boy Robert . . . to some university.** What influence did the university have on Carlyle? As to the point that Burns might have changed the whole course of British literature, Aiton quotes a passage from Andrew Lang: "I have not made much lament for the poverty of Burns. He had, probably, about as much schooling as Shakespeare; he had the best education for his genius. Better Scots poetry he could not have written had he been an Ireland scholar; and his business was to write Scots poetry. The people of whom he came he could not have represented as he did, if a long classical education and many academic years had come between him and the clay bigging of his birth. He could not have bettered *Tam O'Shanter*, or *Hallowe'en*, or the *Jolly Beggars*, if he had been steeped in Longinus and Quintilian, Dr. Blair his rhetoric, and the writings of Boileau. A man's work, after all, is what he could do and had to do. One fails to see how any change of worldly circumstance could have bettered the true work of Burns."

103 : 7. **Let us worship God.** See *Cotter's Saturday Night*.

103 : 28. **In glory and in joy.** From Wordsworth's *Leech Gatherer*, stanza 7. This is the sole reference in the essay to Wordsworth, for whom Carlyle had little admiration, although many of their ideas are similar.

104 : 2. **The gayest, brightest, most fantastic, etc.** Henley, after referring to the mental and physical suffering of Burns's early life,—a life described by Burns himself as the "cheerless gloom of a hermit with the unceasing toil of a galley slave,"—says that the poet escaped with a lifelong tendency to vapors and melancholia. "William Burness is indeed a pathetic figure; but to me the Robert of Mount Oliphant is a figure more pathetic still."

104 : 10. **A kind of mud-bath.** Cf. Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, canto liii:—

"And dare we to this fancy give,  
 That had the wild oat not been sown,  
 The soil, left barren, scarce had grown  
 The grain by which a man may live ?

"Or, if we held the doctrine sound  
 For life outliving heats of youth,  
 Yet who would preach it as a truth  
 To those that eddy round and round ?"

106 : 23. "Hungry Ruin has him in the wind." An expression used by Burns in a letter to Dr. Moore.

106 : 28. Wild farewell to Scotland. *The Gloomy Night is gathering Fast.* The last line should read,—

"Farewell my bonie banks of Ayr."

107 : 18. Rienzi, a Roman patriot of the fourteenth century, who revived the title of Tribune of the People. His great power turned his head, however, and he became a tyrant.

109 : 9. Professor Ferguson's. Adam Ferguson (1723-1816), professor of Philosophy at Edinburgh prior to Dugald Stewart.

109 : 14. Bunbury (1750-1811). An amateur artist and caricaturist.

109 : 26. Langhorne. John Langhorne (1735-1779), author of the poem *The Country Justice* (so the poem is called in Chalmers's *British Poets*) and, with his brother William, the translator of Plutarch's *Lives*.

110 : 3. Mr. Nasmyth's picture. Alexander Nasmyth (1758-1840), painted the well-known portrait of Burns now in the National Gallery in London.

112 : 19. The good old Blacklock. Thomas Blacklock (1721-1791), a blind poet of Edinburgh. In the autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore, Burns says, referring to his projected passage to the West Indies: "A letter from Dr. Blacklock to a friend of mine, overthrew all my schemes by opening new prospects to my poetic ambition. The doctor belonged to a set of critics for

whose applause I had not dared to hope. His opinion, that I would meet with encouragement in Edinburgh for a second edition, fired me so much, that away I posted for that city, without a single acquaintance or a single letter of introduction."

114 : 20. **The treatment of the woman.** Henley says: "Against this panorama of tumult and variety and adventure, enlarged in Edinburgh, and enriched at Ellisland and in Dumfries, there are to be set the years of simple abnegation, magnanimity, and devotion with which 'the facile and empty-headed girl' [as she is called by some writers] repaid the husband of her choice."

117 : 25. **Grocerdom and Grazierdom.** Trading class and farmers.

118 : 11. **Lady Grizzel Baillie** (1665-1746). "A Loyalist lady, one of the heroic figures in Scotch history."

122 : 4. **Friendship . . . no longer exists.** During the very year that Carlyle wrote these words Arthur Hallam and Alfred Tennyson began a friendship, the most notable in English literary history, immortalized in *In Memoriam*.

123 : 24. **Cervantes**, author of *Don Quixote*, and at one time a slave in Algiers.

125 : 12. **Roger Bacon** (1214-1294), an English philosopher, who wrote *Opus Majus*.

125 : 13. **Galileo.** Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), an Italian physicist and astronomer.

125 : 13. **Tasso.** Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), an Italian poet, author of *Jerusalem Delivered*.

125 : 14. **Camoens.** Luiz de Camoens (1524 (?)-1580), a Portuguese poet, author of the *Lusiad*.

126 : 29. **Restaurateur.** A restaurant keeper; perhaps, as Noyes suggests, Carlyle had in view a man like Scott, who simply affords entertainment for people.

128 : 1. **Locke.** John Locke (1632-1704), one of the greatest of English philosophers; he advocated reason, toleration, and common sense in all things.

128 : 9. **Araucana.** An heroic poem written by Alonso de Ercilla, a Spanish soldier and poet of the sixteenth century.

129 : 16. **He has no Religion.** Can this be said of one who wrote the *Cotter's Saturday Night?* Burns had reverence, had a genuine sorrow for his many sins, but he had no fixed faith. The point that Carlyle makes against Burns is the one he made often with regard to his own age. He says in *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, "A man's religion is the chief fact with regard to him. A man's or a nation of men's. By religion I do not mean here the Church-creed which he professes, the articles of faith which he will sign, and, in words or otherwise, assert. . . . But the thing a man does practically believe, the thing a man does practically lay to heart, and know for certain; concerning his vital relations to this mysterious universe and his duty and destiny there, that is in all cases the primary thing for him." In *Signs of the Times* he defines religion as a "thousand-voiced song from the heart of Man to his Invisible Father, fountain of all goodness, beauty, truth."

129 : 24. **Rabelais.** Francois Rabelais (1495-1553), a celebrated French humorist of the sixteenth century, creator of Pantagruel and Gargantua.

130 : 24. **Jean Paul.** The pseudonym of Jean Paul Friedrich Richter (1763-1825), a famous German writer who is said to have influenced the formation of Carlyle's style.

135 : 14. **Swift.** Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), the keenest of English satirists, author of *Gulliver's Travels*, *Tale of a Tub*, etc.

135 : 14. **Rousseau.** Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), a Swiss-French writer whose radical ideas had much to do with bringing on the French Revolution. His best known books are *La nouvelle Héloïse*, *Le contrat social*, *Émile*, and *Confessions*.

135 : 29. **Valclusa Fountain.** The Italian poet Petrarch (1304-1374) lived at Vaucluse, near Avignon, and wrote many poems about the fountain there.



